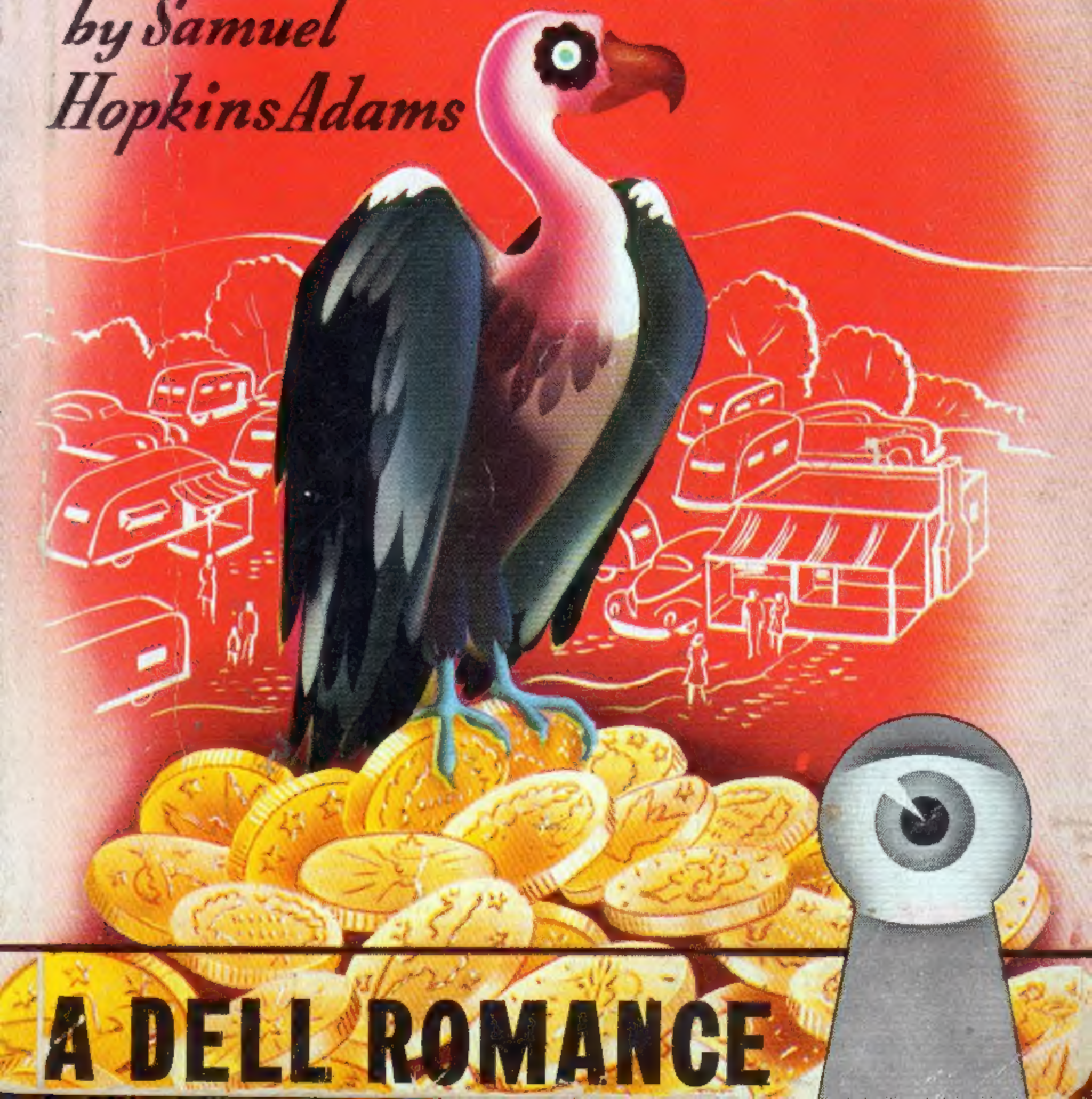
DELL PUBLISHING PRESENTS

Tambay Gold

by Samuel Hopkins Adams



A DELL ROMANCE

TAMBAY GOLD

The Persons this Story is about—

MOM BAUMER,

Lady of the Roads, the unpublished exponent of the restless life of the automobile highways—proprietor of the Feederia, a traveling restaurant.

JANE ANN JUDSON,

a pretty girl known to her friends as Juddy; the last of the Maurie line and present owner of Tambay, the old plantation that dates back to pre-Civil-War days.

PROFESSOR LOREN OLIVER,

an assistant professor at Welliver University, whose whole interest is apparently in digging for Indian relics at Tambay, but who is more human, really, than that.

ANGEL TODD,

the charming, swell-looking athlete, famed far beyond Welliver University as a great football player; a frequent visitor at Tambay to woo Juddy.

MAURIE SEARS,

a slim, straight, dark Southern gentleman, a descendant of the Maurie line; a good lawyer when he is sober.

OLD SWOBY,

a little old Slovene refugee who always wears a red cap, who fishes near Tambay, and who runs in fear whenever he hears an airplane.

HOLLISTER MOWRY,

the Sheriff who wants to know too much and "dishes out a hot line of halfway questions"; one of the believers in the legend of Tambay gold.

HENDERSON KENT,

the New York playboy with more money than anyone needs; Jane Ann Judson's husband for one month.

LOLITA MARQUESAS,

the glamorous, red-headed movie actress (née Carnival or "Carnie"), who shows an unusual interest in Mom Baumer's Feederia.

OLLIE and NOLLIE,

the two long, thin, Gullah Negro girls who have served the masters of Tambay for many years.

TAMBAY GOLD

What the Story is about—

Into the cloistered peace and decay of an ancient Carolina plantation, two alien women intrude their vigorous personalities and diverse motives: Juddy, the pretty girl who inherits Tambay, and Mom, the salty nomad whose racy and reckless way of speaking right out delights her friends and dismays her enemies. Necessity and ambition combine in their persons to form a partnership of startling opposites. Between them they desecrate local tradition by transforming the ancestral estate into a tourist camp where every moment is charged with action, and underlying it are the suspense and excitement of an intriguing mystery.

Three men attempt by ardent wooing to break through the defensive walls within which young Juddy encloses what she is sadly pleased to consider the ruins of her life. The football star, the courageous old tragic Southern aristocrat, and the vigorous prospector for strange gold, all work upon Juddy's destiny, while Mom good-naturedly pulls the strings.

BOOKS ARE WEAPONS—in a free democracy everyone may read what he likes. Books educate, inform, inspire; they also provide entertainment, bolster morale. This book has been manufactured in conformity with wartime restrictions—read it and pass it on. Our armed forces especially need books—you may give them to your nearest U.S.O. office, leave them at your public library, or send them direct to *Commanding General, 4th Corps Area Headquarters, Atlanta, Ga.*, marked *"For Army Libraries."*

A MOM BAUMER ROMANTIC ADVENTURE

TAMBAY GOLD

By SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

Author of "The Gorgeous Hussy,"
"It Happened One Night," "Revelry," etc.

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TAMBAY GOLD

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Foreword

MOM BAUMER *first loomed upon my horizon in a cloud of dust and helped me out of a ditch that a sheep had helped me into. Chance brought us together at a gas corner. We became friends over a third can of ale. Thereafter, wherever I was motoring, I inquired for her at the gasseries and, when lucky enough to pick up her trail, would make any reasonable detour to encounter her and her traveling restaurant. Thus I have sampled her food and her philosophy in at least fourteen states of the Union.*

Mom is the unpublished exponent of the restless life of the roads. She sings to one clear harp in divers tones the Saga of Gasoline, the travelogue of the humming wheels, the swift cycle of vagrant America, rootless and goalless, moved by the sole impulse of change, blown upon gusts of vapor along shifting vistas to a blind destination; escapists from ties, responsibilities, laws, and taxes; random human particles in the windy dust of a thousand highways. She is one with the tribe.

"Remember this about the road," says Mom, "that it has no end. Once you've taken to it, you've got a pass to the world. Any road; I don't care which or where. It may twist and turn and change its name, its air, its heat and cold, but always it goes on till you reach tide-water or the mountain snowdrifts. You never can tell

what adventure may lie around the next corner. Turn to the right and you meet up with money, happiness, romance. Turn to the left and death rises in front of you. Show me where you can find another gamble like that.

"That's my world," says Mom. "Wheels. Wheels and dust. To get the full of it you've got to travel for the love of the change it holds, not because you want to get somewhere. Ask a true roader where he's bound, and he tells you 'North' or 'South' or 'West.' He's told you all he knows. Gypsies? We're more free of foot than any gypsy. They are bound to the clan. Our only tie is to the four wheels that carry us anywhere, or nowhere."

Thus Mom Baumer, Lady of the Roads.

For a time last year the gasseries had no news of her. There was an incredible rumor that she had settled down. Then, quite by chance, I heard of her as convalescing in a Richmond hospital. Thither I hastened, bearing flowers and strong drink. Mom greeted me left-handed, her right being in splints.

"A litter of pigs that I tried to dodge," she said. "Howsa boy?"

"But, Mom, where have you been?"

"Tambay."

"What's Tambay?"

"What's in that package? I thought so. There's a corkscrew in the top drawer. Okay...here's how. Tambay? I'll tell you."

She told me.

S.H.A.

Tambay Gold

Chapter One
Not Wired for Thrills

The man at the crossroads gassery came out to the pump.

"Why, it's Mom Baumer," he said. "Hiya, Mom."

"Hiya, pal," I said. "Fill her up."

"Must be five years since I seen you," he said.

"All of that," I said. "You've got a good memory."

"Oh, nobody ever forgets you, Mom," he said.

I guess that's right, too. I'm a sort of institution on the roads. He took a gander at my trailer.

"How's the feed trade?" he asked, being polite.

"I'm still giving satisfaction," I told him.

"Oil?" he said.

"Sure," I said. "You're entitled to your profit." There's no money in the gas. Hardly more than overhead.

While he was polishing the windshield I said, "What's this I hear about Tambay Plantation?"

"It's right," he said. "Life among the ruins. Poor

relation."

"What sort?"

"Yankee. Keeps herself to herself."

"Would she take in a tourist, do you reckon?"

"Would the White House?" he said. "Tambay's still Tambay."

"Okay, pal," I said. "But that's where I bunk. I've got a particular reason for wanting to sleep there tonight."

"Excuse me while I laugh," he said.

So I left him to enjoy himself and went on. Coming into Tambay Plantation I rolled along quietly. Opposite the mansion I dropped the trailer. I didn't want to startle the poor relation too much. She might have a weak heart.

Before turning in at the big entrance, I switched off my lights. What with the rain and the wind, there wasn't much danger of my being heard before I was ready. I got out of the car and hung a gadget of mine that had been a good old stand-by many a time when I wanted a lodging, on the gatepost.

Through the untended shrubbery between the live oaks I could make out Tambay Mansion. It was like a tired old lady, tired of everything, even of pride, but with the everlasting guts to keep her chin up against all comers, no matter how shabby and sad and poor she might be. Well, I was feeling a little like a tired old

lady myself, after ten years on the road. I could use some rest.

One light was burning. If there's anything else in creation as lonely as a single light in the dark and the wet, I don't want to see it.

I knocked on the door: a good, hard, honest knock. The light moved and the door opened on a chain.

"Who is it?"

I was all set for a scrawny old-maid type with slit eyes and a New England yellow skin. This wasn't it, at all. The voice didn't have a poor-relation whine either.

"Could I get a room?" I said.

"No," she said. "You're in the wrong place."

"Tourists Accommodated," I said. "Are you going to make a liar out of your sign?"

"There's some mistake," she said.

"Can I read plain lettering or can't I?" I said. "Come and see."

She got an umbrella and we sloshed through the long grass. I switched my pocket flash onto the place where I'd done my picture hanging.

"What about it?" I said.

Instead of answering, she put up a hand and felt the woodwork back of my sign. Naturally, it hadn't had time to get wet. She was nobody's fool, that gal.

"Do you get away with it often?" she asked.

"More often than you might think," I told her. "Anyway, it's a talking point."

"I'm afraid your batting average is due for a slump," she said.

I guessed that maybe she didn't have entire confidence in me. So I put the spotlight on myself.

"Mom Baumer," I said. "Fat and fifty; wet and tired."

She kind of hesitated. "There's only the north room furnished," she said. "It leaks."

"So does this sky," I said.

"I don't know," she said to herself. "Why do you pick on Tambay?" she asked.

"It's a long story," I said. "I'd do a lot better by it in the morning."

"I'm Jane Ann Judson," she said.

"Then I can bring in my nightie and my toothie?"

"All right. At your own risk."

That north room would sure have been a risk for anyone in weak health. Pots and pans did their best to take care of the dribbles. The bed was pretty clammy, and I spent some active moments playing tag with one of those slippy silk spreads that ought to be in jail for abandonment. But a good conscience is better than a shot of dope, as the almanac says, for I was still dead to the world when some high-class breakfast smells woke me up with a twitching nose.

While I was dressing, I thought back to my first sight

of Tambay Plantation. It was all of twenty-five years ago. I wasn't on my own at that time. I was with a carny show. Acrobatics, an animal turn, and a touch of parlor magic on the side. We pitched by the streamside at Tambay Bend, and when I sneaked out after the show and saw the old mansion, with all the lights going and the saddle horses hitched to the big trees, and heard the music and the soft, young Southern voices, I got a yen for it that never died out. You wouldn't expect the proprietress of a traveling nosebag to be romantic. Okay, I'm as God and the roads have made me.

When next I came by the place, it was still the social bigtop of the county, but slipping. Then, years later, I hear that all the Mauries of Tambay are dead, and their friends and kin that kept the place warm and happy with love are scattered or broke. But it would always be the old Tambay for me.

Jane Ann Judson was already at the table when I got down. In the morning light she looked younger than I'd figured her. Two long, thin, darky girls that I spotted for Gullahs from the islands as soon as I heard their talk, were busy about the breakfast.

"Good morning," Jane Ann Judson said. "How did you make out?"

"Swell," I told her. "I had the night of my life."

"Was it as bad as that?"

"No, I mean it," I said. "You wondered why I picked

on Tambay. Remember about the little girl in the story that wanted to sleep in the queen's chamber just once, even if she got her head cut off for it? Well, that's me and Tambay. I've always had a terrific yen for this place. After I first saw it, and that was before you were born, I used to have a dream. I'd got rich, and I'd bought Tambay, and I could see myself sitting in the drawing-room in a dark red satin gown with a brooch, and lifting a finger to an old, silver-whiskered darky, and saying in a cultured voice, 'You may now fetch the juleps, Erastus.' Do you wonder I got a kick out of last night?"

"You couldn't sit in the drawing-room now," she said with a sort of sigh in her throat.

"No?" I said.

"Nothing to sit on. It's all been sold to the antique hunters. Before I got here."

"The place wouldn't be for sale, maybe?"

"Not if I can help it." Her face went quiet and secret. There were things back of the look that she didn't want to think about.

"Mind if I snoop around a little?"

"Go anywhere you like."

After breakfast she took her fly-rod and went down to Tambay Bend to get a mess of fish for dinner, leaving me with the two Gullahs. I've always modeled my life on the fella that made a big success minding his own business. What I mean to say, I never ask ques-

tions except, of course, when I want to find out something. Because what other way is there? I went to work on Ollie and Nollie.

"How long have you girls been here?"

"Us? We been livin' heah sence Mist' Clement Maurie's time."

"With Miss Judson?"

"Oh, no'm, Miss Jane Ann, she on'y been heah a little piece. She let us stay on cause we ain' got no othah place to res'. An' she gotta have sumbuddy."

"Hasn't she got any folks?"

"No'm. Her pa an' ma was killed in a accident. I don' reckon she had no othah kin. Her ma was a Maurie. That's how-come she heired Tambay."

Well, I looked the place over and located a sweet spot for my trade, between road and river, high jut of land with nice trees. So I towed the trailer in and was ready for Miss Jane Ann when she came back.

"What do I owe you?" I asked her.

"Nothing." She set down a nice string of mottled perch.

"That isn't business," I told her. "I'm a-businesswoman and this is a business call."

"What kind of business?" She said it more to show polite interest than because she cared.

"Vittles."

She drew down her brows at me in a funny, cute,

puzzled way she had.

"Do you run a traveling grocery or something?"

"Not exactly. Here's my style and quality." I handed her my business card. It was a tasty job in three colors, a small copy of the road canvas I hung out wherever I settled in for trade.

Stop & Eat
at
THE FEEDERIA
Everything of the Best.

Sandwiches with a Soul; Coffee with Character.
Yum-yum Pancakes and Succulent Sausage.
Hoppinjohn from Befo' de Wah.
Biscuits like Grandma Used to Bake.
Short Orders to Suit One and All.
MRS. VERBENA (MOM) BAUMER, COOK & PROP'R.

"Has that got belly appeal or hasn't it?" I said.

I don't think she took to it at first. "Ouch!" she said. "Feederia!"

"Feeder*i*a," I said. "Spanish accent but good, American cooking. Come over and look at the grub wagon."

Over the years, I've put a lot of thought and work into my layout. I don't believe that's anything better on wheels. Jane Ann took it all in, table with benches to hold twelve at a pinch, stove with a collapsible tin chimney at one end and a washboiler underneath, the plates and cups racked along the walls, pegs for the

tinware, and an overhead trolley, my own invention, for carrying the filled orders.

"It's the neatest thing I ever saw in my life," she said.

"All it needs is standing room for its four wheels," I said. "What do you say to a dollar a day?"

"You mean you want to start in business *here?*"

"Start!" I said. "Listen, gal. I've spread my smoke and wowed the feeders in every state in the Union this ten years and better, and now I'm about ready to pull out of the traffic and be a violet by a mossy stone for a spell. What's that stretch of ground producing for you? Sparkleberry and ragweed. Could you use the money or not?"

"Oh, I could!" she said.

"Then do we deal?"

"You had this in mind when you came."

"Well, I didn't just exactly happen in on you," I admitted.

She grinned at me. "You're a dangerous character, Mrs. Baumer."

"Skip the flattery," I said. "I'm dangerous only when roused. And I've never double-crossed a pal or welched on a deal."

"But this is a side road," she said. "Nothing much comes through here."

"It'll be coming."

"How do you know?"

"It's my business to know about roads and what runs on 'em. There's a short-cut booked through here to hook up with the main route fifty miles south." I got out my road map. "Look. Here's Tambay. Two hoots and a holler down creek the new bridge goes in. There'll be a detour set within a couple of weeks that'll begin to divert the traffic to us. And will we be sitting pretty! Here's Brandon, four miles west. What's the hotel there? A dump. Leverton's twenty miles east with a two-by-four inn that's dying on its feet from trying to put over big-town prices. Beyond that is Welliver U. We ought to be able to cut in for a piece of the college trade. After all, what would we have in the way of competition? Not a decent feed joint at a reasonable price for fifty miles either way. The gasseries have nothing but Bar-B-Q stuff, take it or leave it and I'd advise leaving it. Start a classy feederia here and you're set. It may not be a sight draft on the U. S. Treasury exactly, but it ain't hay either. By the way, I like to know what's next me. Who's the Hairy Ainu and why do you keep him in a stockade?"

"Oh," she said, "he won't bother you. He's an Indian digger."

"You don't mean a Digger Indian, do you? He looks white around the edges, though I didn't get a very good look at him."

"He's a professor or something at Welliver Uni-

versity, I believe."

"Did he just happen in and build that picket fence around him?"

"No. There's some sort of ancient lease that gives the University a right to dig holes in my property."

"You don't like it, do you?"

"Not much. But there is nothing I can do about it."

"Have you ever spoken to him about it?"

"No. He only comes out at night, I guess."

"What do you say we go over and investigate him?"

She shook her head. "Not interested. I don't like whiskers. You talk to him."

A signed work of art by Welliver University, warmly inviting me and everybody else to keep out, stared me in the face. Inside, somebody was working with a pick and meaning every lick of it. I pushed open the gate and the worker looked up.

Well, I was prepared for whiskers, but this bird looked like the players' bench of the House of David. Above the waist he wore a pair of sunglasses. His body looked brown and hard.

"Good afternoon, Prof," I said.

He leaned on his pick. "How do you do?" he said. "Didn't you see the sign?"

"Sure, I saw the sign," I said. "But Welliver University needn't stand on formality with a neighbor. I just dropped in to tell you that lunch will be served in

the dining car at twelve noon."

"Thank you," he said. "I brought my own."

"No sale then?"

"No sale, I'm afraid." He took up his pick.

"In that case," I said, "hail and farewell."

He took off his glasses to blink at me. Nice eyes, I noticed. "You aren't by any chance one of my dear little pupils, masquerading for an initiation stunt, are you?" he asked.

"Old Mom Baumer, as advertised," I said, and handed out my card.

"Thank you," he said. He looked at the card as if he didn't know what to do with it, and put it in his pants pocket.

"Come over and try the menu," I said. "It's on the house this time."

Well, I could see that he didn't want to, but he couldn't figure how to get out of it. I put up a first-class feed for him and he liked it. As a conversationalist he was hard going. But I dredged out of him that he was Assistant Professor of Amerind Ethnology over at Welliver, on a special assignment to excavate for relics. It was delicate work; nobody but an expert could be trusted with it. He was all wrapped up in it; you could see he'd much rather have been let alone to think about it while he ate than have to talk to me. So I handed him one.

"There must be a reason for whiskers like yours, Professor."

"Gnats," he said. I expect I looked startled, for he went on kind of hurriedly. "Insects, you know. It keeps them off."

"Are you going to be here right along?" I asked.

"No," he said. "My month is up in a few days. Then I go back to my classwork. But I expect to be working here week-ends. Those are very fine batter cakes, Mrs. Baumer."

"Sour milk," I said. "It makes 'em lighter on the tongue. Ready to serve any time."

"I'll remember that," he said. "Thank you very much. I've enjoyed it."

I figured that I'd maybe won me a boarder.

The hour after lunch I put in looking around the plantation. It was pretty sad. The grand old place was all gone to seed. There had been a gale of wind the week before and the broad lawn in front was all cluttered. The garden was a jungle. The barn was a shell, the smokehouse a wreck, and half the stables had fallen in. A scrawny cow mooed out in the meadow, and a flock of draggle-tailed chickens huddled in what used to be a shed. Spread out as far as you could see were a couple of hundred acres of wasted field and woodland.

The house wasn't any better. A person with a busted glass eye could see that the whole show was headed for

the junk pile. It didn't seem right for anything as young and fresh and vivid as Jane Ann Judson to be buried in the landslide. One of the things I had to find out was why she was there all by herself. So I invited her to supper.

"I'm not rightly open for trade yet," I told her. "There won't be anyone else unless the Indian digger comes in. Do you good to meet a little company."

Her face took on that shadow that I'd noticed before. "Oh, no—I couldn't," she said.

"Why not? He's harmless."

"I just don't want to see people."

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way about it."

"Please don't mind my not being clubby."

"I don't mind anything," I said. "Just to prove it, I'm going to shoot you full of questions."

"What kind of questions?" I could feel her tense up.

"Snoopy ones, of course. Nobody's got to look twice at you to see that you've been used to money. Plenty of it."

"There isn't plenty of it any more."

"Not enough to swing this place, I reckon."

"No."

"Then what are you here for?"

She hesitated over that. Then she must have figured that I was friendly. Generally, I can persuade people to that idea because I *am* friendly. She said, "I've got to live

somewhere. There's no other place for me. My theory is that I'll keep this up as long as I can and then go down with the ship." I liked the way she said it and the set of her chin and the look in her eye that said she wasn't asking any odds of hell or horseflesh. *My* theory was that she had what it takes, that kid.

"Maybe the ship won't go down," I said, for an idea was fermenting in the old brainpan.

"Maybe not," she said. It didn't sound too hopeful.

I tapped my garter and peeled off three ten-spots from the roll. She frowned at them.

"What's this?" she said.

"The first month's rent."

"Just for wagon space?"

"With privileges. Wood and water."

"It's too much."

"It's either worth that or nothing at all. My risk."

She took the money then. "All right," she said. "Thank you." She was coming unshrunk a little.

I gave the space the once-over. There was plenty to be done before I could get going. First I went to the stockade and touched Prof. Loren Oliver for a brush hook. There's nothing like borrowing to start you on a friendly footing with the neighbors.

Weeds and scrub grew waist-high. I was just working up a nice sweat when a jalopy rattled in and a young Greek god got out. He was a big, square-

shouldered, flat-backed, blond-haired bird with nice, friendly blue eyes and a Welliver football sweater. He stopped to read my display banner that was spread across some bushes to let the sun dewrinkle it; then he came over to where I was slaughtering the vegetation.

"Hiya, Mom Baumer," he said.

"That's me," I said. "Please to meetcha, Big-and-Handsome."

"The same to you," he said. "How about a spot of breakfast?" He yawned a faceful of the whitest teeth anybody would want.

"Breakfast!" I said. "It's two o'clock, p.m."

"It'll be breakfast for me. And do I need it! I could eat a horse."

"Just out of horsemeat. Eggs. Ham or bacon. Griddle cakes. Coffee and toast."

"Right. That's my order," he said.

I took him to the grub wagon and he sat at the table and chatted, very sociable, about the chances of next fall's team, until the order came, and then he didn't have time for anything else.

"Your night on the tiles hasn't spoiled your appetite, Big Boy," I said.

"Tiles, your eye!" he came back at me. "I've been gold prospecting."

"And this is the Hotel Ritz," I said.

"No, I mean it. Haven't you heard? It's headlined

in the papers. They've struck gold again. Back in the Colony Hills. Near where the old mines used to be."

Well, I'd heard about some old mines there. But they'd quit working them before the Civil War.

"Find anything?" I asked.

"Not a sparkle. I've got no luck anyhow." And he smiled like a cherub on a pink cloud.

"You ought to be able to roll your own luck, with that face and shape," I told him.

"Thanks," he said, finishing the last of six cakes. "How about putting this on the hook, Mom? I'm Angel Todd."

So this was the Great Todd. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, as they used to say in Montana, rules are rules.

"Angel or devil, there's no tick here," I said. "That'll be sixty-five cents, please."

He spilled his cash pocket, spreading out two quarters, three dimes, a nickel, and seven pennies.

"How much gas could I buy for twenty-seven cents?" he asked. "The old boat's about dry."

Well, I went soft. I told him to put his money back. While he was promising that he'd be over to settle soon, his face lit up like a parade. I took a look outside, and there was Miss Jane Ann Judson, coming up from the river bank. She was something to look at in her neat jodhpurs and boots and leather jacket, with her ruddy

hair fluffed around her face and her eyes clear and steady and deep brown.

"What's *that?*" Angel Todd said.

"My niece," I said, looking him in the eye.

"Any niece of yours is a niece of mine, Mom," he said. He swiveled around to the door. "Hiya, Toots!" he called.

She came over to the wagon steps. She looked at him and then at me and she didn't say a word. Only, her eyebrows went up.

Angel Todd got red in the face. He snapped to his feet like a buck private coming to attention.

"My error," he said. "Mrs. Baumer, what about it?"

"All right," I said. "Meet Miss Jane Ann Judson. This is Angel Todd. That name mean anything to you?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't," she said. "Should it?"

He looked like he didn't believe her. "Don't you ever read the sporting pages?" he said.

"Not the local ones."

"Uncle!" he said. *"Local!"* He gave me a well-can-you-beat-that look.

I kind of liked the way he spotted her for class after his false start, so I gave him a hand. "A probably All-American triple threat isn't exactly local," I told her.

"Oh!" she said. "Sorry." As an apology, it was very cold storage.

"Look," he said, "there's a basketball game Saturday. I'm playing. If I sent a couple of tickets, would you be interested?"

"Mom might. I wouldn't, thank you," Jane Ann answered him. "I'm on my way to the village," she said to me.

"Well, look," he said, "you don't have to go this second, do you? Look, now. There's a Rogues' Dance next week. You know: Chi Rho Gamma. What about that, girlie— I mean, Miss Judson?"

This found no market either. Jane Ann asked me if there was anything I wanted from town and went away. I almost thought Angel was going to sob on my shoulder. "What's the matter with her?" he said. "Or is it with me?" You could see that he wasn't used to missing out like this.

"Oh, you're all right, I guess," I said. "But Jane Ann Judson is nobody's yes-girl."

Well, he stood around for a while, but having nothing further to say except good-by, he said it and was on his way in his old tin can.

"You sure handed him the ice tray," I told Jane Ann Judson when she got back. "What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing special," she said. "Nothing at all, I guess."

"You've got to admit he's got something," I said. "Don't you get it at all?"

"You see," she said kind of tired, "I've seen him

before."

"What goes on here?" I said. "You *know* this bird?"

"Not him exactly," she said, "but the type. Traveling on their manly charm. It isn't good enough. First thing you know, the charm goes out like a light and you bump against things in the dark. Oh, well! It isn't fatal. Only you lose your taste for it."

"When I was your age," I said, "a lad like Angel Todd would have been the big thrill for me."

She stared right past me like she was looking a long way off. "Perhaps I'm not wired for thrills," she said.

I know plenty girls are that way. I'd never believe it of her, though. Not with those faintly shadowed eyes, and the full, warm, generous lips.

I didn't say anything. But I wondered what had happened to her.

Chapter Two

KIDNAPING SUGGESTED

NEXT MORNING I was up early for the truck trade. Truckies are the pick of the road. Hearty eaters and no kick on a fair price for a good article. They know what they want and want the best and won't stand for anything different. Treat 'em right and they'll spread the glad tidings. Once they put the radio to work for you, you're set. They may be tough, those babies, but I'd rather have their good word than anything the limousines can hand me. A tourist is a tourist; here today and gone tomorrow. But the truckies have got routes. They come back!

Six lots had fed by seven o'clock, and I was tidying up after them when Jane Ann Judson strolled in. She took a gander at my three-color banner that I'd strung across the right of way between a redgum and cottonwood, and a queer look spread across her face. She cocked an ear at the ground like a robin listening for a worm.

"What's the idea?" I said.

"Can't you hear the Mauries turning in their graves?"

"The exercise will do 'em good. How do you like

my advertising display, yourself?"

"Matter of taste," she said.

"Matter of business," I told her. "It pulls. I'm carrying my overhead already today. This is going to be Busy Corner."

"Do you really like doing it?" she asked. There was a kind of wistfulness in the way she spoke, like she wished she had something to do that she liked.

"It's my line," I said. "Show me any other as good. Take sandwiches, for instance. You smear a cent's worth of bread with a dash of butter, slip in a two-cent slab of meat, a lettuce leaf and a pickle, and what have you got? A barbecue sandwich that you can sell for two bits, twenty-five cents, the quarter part of anybody's dollar. That's business. That's trade. That's progress, private enterprise, and the profit system rolled in one package. That's what's made America what she is today and don't let anybody tell you different. Of course, you got to have a knack for cooking. Now I love to cook. The clean-up part I won't say so much for. You know what the poet says:

> Cook, and the world eats with you.
> Wash, and you're on your own.

If I never saw another dirty dish in my life, I could still get along."

She kind of laughed. "You wouldn't need a helper,

would you?"

"You mean it right, I guess," I said. "But—well, kind hearts are more than coronets and all that, but they don't make a cook out of a society deb."

"I'm no deb," she said. "And I've got no illusions about cooking. My theory is I might be able to help with the dishes when there's a rush. It would give me something to do," she said, half to herself. "I'd terribly like to have something to do."

I don't think she realized what a cry for help it was. "Okay," I said. "I guess I can use you, Juddy."

She stared at me. "What made you call me that?"

"I don't know," I said, and I didn't. "It just seems to fit you. I won't if you don't like it."

"No, it's all right. It—startled me for a minute. It's all right. When do I start in?"

"Right now if you can snitch a couple of perch or brim out of the river before lunchtime. Fresh fish always go good."

The noon R. D. brought a note from Angel Todd, enclosing two tickets for the game:

> Tell that little brown gypsy of yours is she coming peacefully or do I send the patrol wagon. Tell her to have a heart.

I showed her the note, but she just shook her head.

"Not interested?" I said.

"Not interested," she said.

It was more to see Juddy, I expect, than to pay his little bill that fetched Angel back next morning. First off, he'd stopped at Tambay Mansion, which got him nothing except a line on her real connection with the place. After settling his account, he opened up on me.

"What's this niece stuff, Mom?"

"A stall," I told him. "Protection. Keep off the grass. Use no hooks. Beware the dog."

He shook his head. "That gal don't need any barbed-wire fencing. Say, Mom, what's the matter with her anyway?"

"What have you been trying now?" I asked him.

"I tackled her again about the Rogues' Dance. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"Did she act like there was?"

"She didn't act like anything in the girl line that I ever was up against." He looked sadder than a pup in a rainstorm.

"Don't let it throw you, Big Boy. It isn't personal. She's off the world, that's all. Don't ask me why, for I don't know."

"Well, it just isn't natural," he complained. "What are you going to do to get her back into circulation?"

"That's your problem," I told him. But he'd put an idea into my head, just the same.

"Oh, I'm not licked yet," he said. "But why haven't

I run into her before?"

"By what I can make out," I said, "she doesn't go anywhere."

The sounds of a spade working inside the stockade caught his ear. "That must be that louse, Oliver, digging his Indians," he said.

"Where do you get that louse stuff?"

He grinned. "He'd like to give me the heave-o out of school."

"What for? Don't he appreciate your giant intellect?"

"He's sore because he thinks I elected his course for a snap."

"Did you?"

"Sure I did. It always was a snap till he came. Now it's a grind. I'd like to go over and crown him."

He listened again and his face got thoughtful. "Maybe it isn't Indians he's digging for at that."

"What else would it be?"

"I told you there was a gold strike back in the hills."

"This isn't the hills, by fifty good miles."

"No. But there might be a wash down the river. I'll bet that's it. I'll bet those dead Wasaws or Coosaws or Seesaws or whatever they were are only a cover. I wouldn't put it past Oliver. He's smart, that guy. But he isn't human."

He hit the road I went back to do my duty by my traveling pal. Up to now I had been keeping Dolf under

cover, because I'd learned to go slow about springing him on the public. Folks have silly prejudices against skunks. There's no more peaceable animal in creation, because they don't have to be afraid of anything. If all nature steps aside for you without arguing about the right of way, you naturally get self-confidence. Like all his kind, Dolf is dignified, maybe a little stand-offish, but he is always the gentleman unless somebody starts pushing him around. He's better than a dozen watch-dogs to guard the wagon.

Nobody was in sight, so I slipped the leash and Dolf went out for a look-see. First he walked all around the grub wagon to make sure that everything was jake, then he jogged over and sniffed at Loren Oliver's footprints and the stockade door, trying to figure out what kind of guy he was, and finally he loped across and disappeared down the steep little cliff that dropped to the riverbed. I paced out some estimates for a dream that had been kind of tempting me from a dark corner of my mind and drove a few pegs. When I was through and strolled over to see what was keeping Dolf, I got a shock.

A big old tree trunk stuck out into the stream, and a funny, squatty little man in a queer jacket and an outlandish red cap was fishing from it and talking pleasant and friendly to my pal, who sat on the shore watching him. Only I couldn't understand the language

he talked in, and I doubt if Dolf could. Pretty soon Redcap caught a small chub, took it off the hook, carried it in and offered it to Dolf. Dolf understood that, all right. He sat on his hind legs and ate the fish and waved his paw for thank-you like I taught him. When the man went out on his tree again, Dolf followed and sat down next him.

"Well, I'll be a thissenthat!" I said. Something told me it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

The little man got up and made a jerky, foreign bow. I opened him up with some questions and he told me, in his slow, broken way, that he fished there days when he couldn't find any odd jobs to do, which was most days, and he hoped he wasn't going to be in my way. While we were getting acquainted, there was a heavy buzzing sound, far off and far up.

Well, it was nothing but the northbound mail plane. But the little foreigner threw his hands in the air, and up the bank he went. He made a run for the stockade and swarmed right up over those high palings like a squirrel and fell into the enclosure. When I got there I could hear him moaning and crying with fear, and Oliver talking to him, kind and quiet.

The noise of the plane died away. Oliver opened the gate and walked out with his hand on the little man's shoulder.

"You'll be all right now," he said. The man went

back to his tree, where Dolf was waiting in hopes of another chub.

"Who is he?" I asked Oliver.

"They call him Old Swoby. He's a Slovene refugee."

"Crazy?"

"Only when an airplane comes over. He saw his wife and two children gunned to death by a playful aviator. Who wouldn't be crazy!"

I looked at his eyes; they were hard with anger, and sorry at the same time. And I thought how his voice had sounded when he was comforting the poor devil.

"Doc," I said, "I guess I've been misinformed. I guess you're human after all."

He looked puzzled. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"I've got some private beer on ice," I said. "How about it?"

"Thanks. I'd be delighted," he said.

Dolf came back from the river smelling of fish something awful and begged for the suds of the beer. After Doc helped me give him a bath, Dolf went and sulked under the wagon. He prefers to take his own baths.

The Feederia caught on quick, like it generally does. Business kept coming in steadily, and there were times when I was glad of Juddy's help. It gave me a chance to study her too. As Angel Todd had said, her life certainly wasn't normal. Folks in the neighboring towns had tried to be nice to her, because she was a Maurie.

She'd sidestepped all of them, particularly kids of her own age.

Angel kept on trying. It got him nowhere. She was off men. Definitely. Well, I thought I had the answer. I wondered what would be her comeback if I took her by the shoulders and gave her a good shaking up and said:

"Listen, kid. Snap out of it. What if it did happen to you? It's happened to other girls, and they've come through it with their chins up. So can you. It's only a technicality, anyway. Just because a house has been broken into doesn't necessarily mean that it's been robbed of everything in it. Be your age and sex."

That's what I wanted to say to her. But I didn't. Juddy isn't the kind you can rush. When she got ready, she'd tell me. Or not, as the case may be.

After several scoreless innings, Angel threatened to get sore. He told me he was through. He said he guessed there were other gals within reach. Whoever chose Juddy Queen of the May, anyhow? That line.

Well, the idea he'd planted earlier had been flickering, and now it blazed up and illuminated the old brain like a candle in a pumpkin.

"Listen, Big Boy," I said. "Whatever it is that happened to Juddy has made her man-shy. My theory is"—I'd caught that turn of speech from her—"that if somebody took her by the neck and heaved her into the

social whirl she'd swim rather than sink. Why aren't you the guy?"

"I don't get it, Mom."

"The Rogues' Dance, Simple."

"I've asked her four times. No dice. What more can I do?"

"Take her in a bag."

"Huh?"

"For Pete's sake! Kidnap her, you big boob!"

"Gee!" Angel said.

Chapter Three
The Rogues' Dance

Four likely-looking lads came in at nine-fifteen the evening of the dance and called for waffles. Juddy, who was oiling the order trolley, didn't give them a look. One of them, a brainy-looking bird in spectacles, began to hum the Frosh song.

Go tell your dear old Gramma
That good old Chi Rho Gamma
Is pious like a Sunday school, so won't you join our band?

It was the signal. They all stood up and yelled "What! No beer?" and stuck a bag over Juddy's head and shoulders and carried her out to their car. I yelled "Police!" a couple of times for the record and sneaked into the front seat beside Specs, while the other three were looking after my little pal.

Juddy wouldn't be easy to scare, by my reckoning, but I didn't want to take any chance, so I whispered to my seat mate to put on a line. As the car turned off and began to bump along a woods road, he said:

"Pause for station identification—" and they opened

up with a song. Then the back seat went to it, like the college kids do.

"Rags!"

"Huh?"

"Take a peek in the bag."

"What for?"

"To see if she is alive."

"Does it matter?"

"I think we ought to know. Just for curiosity, lady, *are* you alive?" He must have given the bag a poke, for Juddy's voice came out, good and sharp.

"Don't *do* that!"

"Parm me! She *is* alive, Tatters."

"Have no fear, little one," Rags said. "Burly ruffians though we be, we mean you no harm to life and limb. With less gentlemanly gangsters you might be facing a fate worse than death."

"Though not half so unpleasant," said Tatters.

Juddy giggled and I felt better about her. They pulled up at an abandoned shack and bundled Juddy out into it, while I sat on the steps to check on developments. One of them flashed a light, and she blinked when the bag was off.

Specs said, "I hope we got the right gal."

"Oh, I think so," Tatters said. "Seems to be up to specifications. Look at that figure. And the eyes. Very commendable."

She handed them a haughty one. "I suppose this is some Freshman prank."

"Ah!" said Specs. "What dignity!"

"What poise!" Rags said.

"There's a sense of reserve power. Don't you feel it, fellows?"

"Phooey!" Juddy said. "What are you going to do with me?"

"You're being invited to the Rogues' Dance. Do you mind?"

"You might have asked me that before you started."

"She doesn't mind," Tatters said.

"The social amenities must be preserved," the big rawboned redhead said. "Permit me." He pointed to the one with spectacles. "Presenting Watrous Smith. He's our highbrow."

"Reference: Philosophy III," he said. "May I have the fourth dance?"

"This team are the famous dress-up twins, the Owen brothers. Rags and Tatters to you."

They saluted like wooden soldiers. "Trusting to be favored with your continued patronage, we are and so forth."

It wasn't a bad show. I enjoyed it. But I wasn't so sure about Juddy. The introducer made his bow.

"I'm Van Riper Clark. Gents, meet Miss Judson."

"We're acting in the interests of Angel Todd, our

brother in the indestructible bonds of Chi Rho Gamma," Rags told her.

"If he wants me kidnaped, why doesn't he do it, himself!"

"He's in training and can't take risks."

"So here are we, four of Welliver's brightest and best, asking nothing but to give you the time of your life."

"I want to go home," Juddy said.

"I think you're being very selfish," the one called Watrous Smith said. His voice was full of tears.

"What's selfish about wanting to go home?" Juddy said.

"Here's Mom Baumer, yearning her heart out to go to the dance—"

"Mom? ! !"

"...and you know very well she can't go, unchaperoned."

"Have you kidnaped Mom too?"

"Right," I said. "But so far they've respected my gray hairs."

"Mom," Juddy said, "do you really want to go to this dance?"

"Well, I do," I said. I did too. I like fun.

Juddy kept still quite a long time. So did the snatch party. Wise kids, those. Finally she said:

"I still want to go home. My theory is that if I'm

going to a party, I'd better get into party clothes."

They all gave a yell. I felt that way myself. They drove us back to Tambay and sat outside and drank my beer while Juddy and I were changing.

An hour later we made our royal entry, at the first intermission. Juddy was a picture in a slinky evening gown, and the way she carried herself was something else again, compared to the slump she'd been in.

Angel Todd was in a corner, surrounded by a bunch of drooling female twirps. He didn't spot us at first. But he wasn't missed. As soon as the music struck up, the Kidnaper's Union kept Juddy busy, all right. She was already a success when I noticed the Big Boy cocking an uneasy eye. Probably our timing was wrong; we'd arrived earlier or later than he'd figured, so his program was gummed up.

Pretty soon he came over and shook hands with Juddy and me and said to her right off the bat:

"Do you think I'm a heel?" In his dinner clothes he was about the best-looking thing outside the movies. No blame to Juddy for smiling.

"It was pretty juvenile," she told him.

"I know. But it's the only way I could get you. You're not sore, are you?"

"I like your gang."

"What about me?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"Let's dance."

After the dance they weren't there any more. It got to be fifteen, twenty minutes and I was wondering, when Juddy showed up. There were spots of color in her cheeks and her hair was rumpled.

"Your big friend is a fast worker," she said.

"Where were you?"

"Parked."

"What did you expect?"

She smiled a queer sort of smile. "Parties are the same everywhere, I guess. You get passed from hand to hand around a hot and stuffy floor, and if you slip away outside, things get too personal. Let's slide out of here till I catch my breath."

Rogues' Hall was a big rambling joint. We found an upper passage where it was cool and quiet, with a door overlooking the dance floor. A man in complete soup-and-fish was sitting there, peaceful and patient. He got up.

"Oh!" he said. "Good evening."

"Huh?" I said and took another look. Well, by thissenthat, if it wasn't the Hairy Ainu! Only he'd been dehaired. "Well, Doc!" I said. "So you're a party man."

"When I can't escape. I'm here as faculty representative." His eyes wandered to Juddy.

"This is my sidekick," I said. "Miss Jane Ann Judson. She owns Tambay."

"Oh!" he said. "I understand I'm not welcome there. Sorry, but I'm under University orders."

"Have you stopped the work?" she asked.

"Temporarily. I'm planning some evening digging. Mom is going to board me."

She looked from one to the other of us. "So it's 'Mom,'" she said. "And 'Doc.' How do you two get that way?"

"Oh, we've had a couple of heart-to-hearts," I said.

"I'll bet it was stimulating to the intellect," Juddy said. "You might have let me in. I need a stimulant."

"You don't look it tonight," I told her.

She didn't, either. She was like rippling water with moonlight on it. The Doc kept eying her with a puzzled expression. He spoke like somebody trying to remember.

"Judson, Judson. There was a beautiful young Mrs. Judson with her husband at the Stafford's place in New Hampshire several years ago. It's probably only a chance resemblance—"

"No," she said, "that would be Mother."

"You weren't with them, were you?"

"I was never with them. They kept me in school."

"They spoke of you, though. There was some talk of my tutoring you in vacation. You couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen."

"Is there anything else you know about me?" she

asked. There was a queer, defiant tone to it.

He seemed to be thinking that over before he said, "I used to know Henderson Kent."

"Well?" she said.

"He was two classes below me at Penn. I didn't know him well."

"I did," she said. "Not any more."

"I see," he said.

Her face had turned secret, you might almost call it sulky. Then she braced and said:

"My theory is I'd better get back into circulation."

"May I take you down to the floor?" he asked.

"Fair warning. You might have to dance with me."

"Fair warning to you. I dance badly."

"That's better than not at all."

"Not for me."

"You don't like doing things unless you do them well?"

"Not where doing them badly involves other people."

"I think that shows a small spirit," she said. "However, I've got another theory, which is that if you give me a start, somebody might cut in."

"I'm afraid," he began, but changed his mind. "Very well," he said.

You could have peeled the amazement off the face of the four kidnapers, in layers, when they saw those two on the floor. Pretty soon Angel Todd slithered over

toward them, and then something happened. People were staring, but I couldn't make out what was doing. Next thing, Juddy was back in our midst, and the twins were jumping her.

"Aren't you the little weather breeder!"

"I haven't done anything."

"Maybe not. But there's plenty doing. Coach is straddling Angel's neck."

"What's it all about? Did Angel commit a crime, asking me to dance?"

"Worse. He crashed a house tradition. No student can cut in on a faculty member at a house dance," Van Clark said.

"What a dumb bunny!" Tatters said. "Oliver'll have it in for him worse than ever now. S'pose he flunks him? Where the hell will that leave the team with only Bickle Strother to play right end?"

"Fat chance of flunking the best end we've had in ten years!" Rags said. "There'd be a general strike."

"I never could get excited over college politics," Juddy said and added something about home time.

"Comes the dawn, go the gals," Tatters said. "That's the Chi Rho Gamma formula. Aren't you having yourself a good time? You're getting well and favorably known."

Angel came over, still looking like a ray of sunshine, and tackled her.

"Juddy, are you going to be a pal?"

"Depends on how much trouble it's going to get me into."

"It won't get you into any. But it might pull me out. I'm in a jam."

"What can I do about it?"

"Coach is sore. Now, if I butted in on your hopscotch with Oliver all on my own, I've got a poor case. But if you'll come through and say you gave me the old S O S to get you away from that goon, it'll help."

"Why is he a goon?"

Angel pulled a tendon in his face. "And there I was, thinking myself a boy scout," he said.

"You were only being conceited. I was having a perfectly good time."

"Give me this next dance and I'll apologize."

But Juddy was already dated. So he sat down to make himself solid with me. I was still wondering about the Oliver thing. So I said:

"It wouldn't wreck your life if you didn't get through that Indian course, would it, Big Boy?"

"To hell with the course!" he said. "It isn't that. It's my average. I need the credits. You don't think I'm at Welliver for my health, do you, Mom?"

"I wouldn't say your health needed any stimulating."

He let his voice down a peg. "I'm here to play basketball, hockey, football, and what-have-you and draw

nine hundred smackers per year, besides what I can claw up on summer vacations. Next year there'll be a boost if I make All-American, and how can they stop me? And now this peewee prof is trying to ease me out. At that, maybe I could make a better deal at Balestier," he went on. "Only I kind of like it here. And I like it all the better since I met up with that little pal of yours. You don't think I've queered myself there, do you?"

I gave him some good advice. "Some you can rush and some you must gentle. Cut the catch-as-catch-can stuff. What's your hurry anyway?"

"When you're up against competition, you have to get the jump," he said.

At that, I guess he took what I told him to heart. There was pretty near an hour after that when I didn't see either of them. Neither did anyone else. They were out somewhere, talking it over.

On the way home Juddy said to me, "Trade ought to be looking up, Mom."

"How so?"

"I've been touting the Feederia to every partner I had."

"That's business," I said. "With you for a shill, we ought to be practically a kitchen annex to Welliver. How heavy have you fallen for Angel Todd?"

The way she laughed, low and quick, didn't give me any line. I wanted her to come out of her shell. But I

didn't want she should leave the shell where she couldn't get back in at need.

"I'm not going to fall for anybody," she said. "What do you get if you do?"

"I'll bite," I said. "What *do* you get?"

"Experience," she said, "and that comes too high."

But when I caught her smiling to herself after we got home, I was suspicious again. She had a new look about her, a look like she was listening to music that other folks couldn't hear. And it wasn't hymn tunes either!

I judged that Juddy was getting back in the groove.

Chapter Four

Subconscious Jealousy

What that kid did with the thirty I'd given her made me feel queer behind the eyes. She bought her some paint and brushes, and went pottering around touching up that poor old house where it needed it worst. The idea was better than the result. Nothing less than a professional job would have helped much there.

One part of it, though, she did up brown. She'd blown herself for some banana gold and regilded the old battered house motto with funny lettering over the door, so now you could read it.

St. Francis & St. Benedight
Bless this House from Woful Plighte.

It was the first time I had noticed it.

While I was at my own work, I had cleared more space than the grub wagon needed for itself. You can't afford to overlook any bets when you're out for new trade. I stuck up a board.

PARKING SPACE
15 CENTS PER NIGHT

That was all I could hope to get, seeing we had no shower, conveniences, or W.C. Which means wire connections and not what you think, in trailer language. The first night I had two trailers, the second, five. For the week, I took in three dollars and fifteen cents of that money. Every little helps.

Custom kept coming in to the Feederia, but it wasn't heavy enough so that I needed an extra hand. Juddy took to getting up early and coming over just the same. That was all right with me. It showed she was getting interested in the business. Professionally speaking, she wasn't so hot, though she was willing enough. Either of the Gullah girls could have given her cards and spades with a dishrag. So she thought up another angle. I could call on Ollie and Nollie for the morning rush, if any, while she drove around the country marketing for the wagon.

She was good at it, too. Pretty soon she had the ox-carts coming in regular with fresh vegetables, yard eggs, chickens, fish, and now and again an extra, like a young shoat or a possum. And the prices were right. Juddy was a trader.

When she got back one morning, she found me stretching twine between the stakes I'd pegged out. She stood watching me for a spell with her head on one side like a sassy redbird. I said nothing; just went on, plotting out my squares. Pretty soon it came.

"What are you planning to catch in your web, Spider?"

"It isn't a web," I said. It was, at that. Only I didn't want her to find out till she was caught.

"What is it then?"

"Oh, just an idle dream."

"About what?"

I went right on fastening my lines. "I've still got that sign I had when I came here," I said.

"What sign? Oh! 'Tourists Accommodated.' That one?"

I nodded and got down to my knees to tie a good knot.

"At *Tambay?*"

"The name ought to draw," I said. "And what a site for a row of snappy cabins!"

"Tambay Tourist Camp," she said, and kind of laughed. "That would make us popular with the neighbors!"

"Of course I'd expect to pay more rent," I said. "Or maybe we could work out a percentage basis."

"I'd have to think it over," she said. "Wouldn't it cost you an awful lot to build cabins?"

"That's my lookout," I said. "I've got a little left in the toe of the old sock." I had, too. But not near enough.

"I'm not sure the University lease wouldn't interfere anyway," she said.

"Let's find out. Who's your lawyer?"

"I haven't any."

"This thing has got to be kosher if we're going to deal. There's a young fellow in Leverton named Maurie Sears. They say he's good when sober, and sober except week-ends."

"I think he's my distant cousin or something."

"Let's go."

We packed Ollie and Nollie in the back seat. They were going to look up an old uncle to do some outside work at Tambay.

Near the end of the plantation line Juddy slowed up for a pitch hole. I noticed a buzzard, high up on a bough, teetering in the wind the way they do. He was a bald scrawny old bird, and he reminded me of a nasty old man, balancing on his heels and leering. The tree he was using for a perch was as ugly as he was; a dead shagbark, all charred and black on one side where there was a low limb.

"Somebody been having a bonfire?" I asked, and heard the two darkies back of us drawing in their breaths with a sort of hiss.

Juddy didn't answer. She didn't have to; I got it. They don't scorch tree trunks for fun in this part of the country; not what any decent human would call fun. Besides, I'd heard of the Hanging Tree of Tambay.

After we got to town and the darkies were out of the

way, Juddy said, "They lynched a poor creature there, just before I came to Tambay. I'm going to have it cut down."

Well, I could see trouble there. But it wasn't my turn to speak. We climbed the wooden stairs to the law office.

The minute Maurie Sears set eyes on Jane Ann Judson I began to wonder whether we had come to the right place. Things were liable to get too personal, if I was any judge. He was slim and straight and dark, with brooding eyes that could be surly as an animal's, and a level, thin mouth that had both strength and weakness in the set of it.

I know that sort of Southern gent to the bone. You can say they're a misfit in the modern world, and I guess that's right. Too much past, too much caste, too little sense that their kind belong in museums. They live mostly by tradition and the catchwords that go with it. The Civil War is their eight-ball; they do most of their thinking behind it. Compared to them, a Tammany Democrat is a liberal and a Hardshell Baptist elder, a freethinker. But if you're their kin or their friend, they'll lie for you and die for you, and their given word is a couple of points up on a U. S. Government bond. You may want to laugh at 'em or cuss 'em out, but when all's said and done, you kind of love 'em.

"My great-grandmother married into Tambay," he told her.

"Yes, I know," Juddy said. "That makes us something, doesn't it?"

"I remember Cousin Selene, as a boy," he said. "She was right beautiful. Anyone could tell you were her daughter. She married out of the South." He couldn't quite keep out of his voice that Selene Maurie had smeared the Tambay scutcheon by taking up with a Yankee.

"Maybe you don't want to claim me for a relative when you know what I'm here for." And she let him have it.

The shock wiped his family smile clean off. "Tambay?" he said. "A tourist camp? Tambay!"

"I thought maybe the Feederia might have broken you in to the idea," I said.

He never looked at me, but went right on talking to Juddy. "We all thought the—the barbecue wagon was temporary. I can't see why this lady should want to settle in a place like Tambay."

I didn't care much for the way he said "this lady," and the barbecue-wagon stuff gave me a gripe.

"Keep the sob out of your throat and I'll tell you, pal," I said. "It's the old back-to-the-soil yen. Believe it or not, I'm a sucker for nature. Birds, bees, and butterflies, they get me down. Well, show me a place where nature's had its own way more than at Tambay. Am I right or am I wrong?"

Juddy gave that little low chuckle of hers. "Sweetbriar and the mossy mortgage," she said.

For a while young Mr. Sears gave an impersonation of the chief mourner at a Maurie funeral until he found it got him nowhere, then he listened while Juddy explained that she only wanted to know what she could do with the property in case; that nothing was settled. That cheered him a little. But pretty soon that handsome face of his filled up again with Grade-A reproach.

"You have a right pleasant lot of kinfolks around here, Cousin," he said. "I reckon there would be right sore feelings over this."

"Mom," Juddy said, "look out, we're liable to get ourselves cut by the county."

"I don't mean that," he said. But of course he did.

"Another thing while I'm here," she said. "The Hanging Tree is on Tambay property, isn't it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'm going to have it cut down."

"No," he said, and his voice was hard. "That you can't do."

"Why can't I?"

"No white man or nigger in the county would dare touch that tree."

"Then I'll send away and get someone."

"He'd be killed," he said quietly.

She was getting white around the lips. "I believe you

believe in these horrible lynchings."

I knew the answer before he spoke. It's always the same and generally with that courteous and condescending manner. "Strangers don't understand these things." It's more than half true, too. That's the toughest kind.

Before things could get meaner, I cut in. "Then the University can't gum up any building plans, can they?"

"Not as long as you don't encroach," he said. "That's a ninety-nine-year lease. It runs out next year. It gives them the right of aboriginal research only. All subsoil rights except the Indian discoveries are reserved to Tambay." He smiled at Juddy. "So, Cousin, if Loren Oliver strikes an ore lode, you can legally claim the gold."

Juddy smiled back at him. I guess she figured that we'd been pretty rough with him. "Do you believe there's gold at Tambay?" she asked.

"No, I don't. But plenty do. There are probably people panning Tambay stream right now. By the way, has Hollister Mowry been around to see you yet?"

"No. Who is he?"

"He's one of the believers in the Tambay gold legend. He's sheriff."

"I know him," I said. "He wambled in the other day to size me up. He's got green-gold teeth and grease in his smile and he dishes out a hot line of halfway questions. He wants to know too much, that bird. Come to think of it, he hinted around at having a family interest

in Tambay. How does he get that way?"

Sears looked embarrassed. "I reckon he's right, in a way. It's a—well, a branch of the family. Mowry—Maurie; the name got changed when his line went West."

"Then he's really a cousin?" Juddy said.

He hesitated and then he said, "As a matter of fact, I'm afraid he is. The fifth Maurie of Tambay—that's our great-great-grandfather, yours and mine and his—had a right affectionate nature and casual habits. He left quite a number of descendants carelessly around the neighborhood. One of them founded the Mowry line. This latest one, Hollister, picked up a bit of money mining in Colorado, came back here, and went in for politics. He considers himself a bona fide Maurie."

"I'll have to meet up with my sheriff cousin," she said. "Do you think if I went up to him and gave him the clan grip and the Maurie password, he'd come to the aid of the party?"

Mr. Maurie Sears took it seriously. "You could count on him. He's a queer mixture. In a political or business deal he'd cut his best friend's throat without a quiver. But if you were in trouble and appealed to him on the ground of kin, he'd move heaven and earth for you. He has done me some good turns, just because of the left-handed relationship. After all, the Maurie blood is there, Cousin."

"You needn't call me Cousin. Juddy will do," she said. I wondered whether she caught the look in his eyes. I did.

It struck me that Juddy was having a pretty good time for herself with the Welliver lads, without taking on any extra swains. The Feederia was sure doing business with that institution. Angel Todd ate with us too often for a bird that was paying regular board somewhere else, and so did his four pals in the bonds of Chi Rho Gamma. Several times Juddy went over to the college blowouts, but not always with the same boy. Angel had the inside track, though.

Several times I watched them together, and the queer way she'd look at him had me guessing. Sometimes I thought she was crazy about him. Then again she seemed to be trying to figure out something. I knew Angel's reputation with the gals. Far be it from me to heave the first rock; women make it tough for a swell-looking athlete like Angel Todd: a certain kind of woman. Juddy wasn't that kind though, if I'm any judge. So what? Nobody had pinned a badge on me to be Guardian of the Pure. They were both free, white, and twenty-one. One quiet evening while we were washing up, she said:

"Mom, I think I've been propositioned."

"Then it isn't Angel," I said. "If it had been him, there wouldn't be any 'think' about it."

"It is Angel. He wants me to go with him over next week-end to visit some friends. My theory is that the friend won't be there when we arrive."

"Well, you're going, aren't you?" I was trying her out.

"Is that your advice?"

"I give advice when I'm asked for it."

"All right. I'm asking."

"My theory is that any gal who goes out with that sweet lad had better keep her feet at half-past six," I told her.

She looked stumped. "I don't get it. Why at that time, specially?"

"*Pointing* at half-past six. Look at your watch."

She got it then. "Mom, you're a vulgar old wench," she said.

"I'm a wise old bird," I told her. "On the other hand, if you can't get him out of your system any other way, and are looking for experience, that's something else again."

"Looking?" she said, and those straight, strong, pretty brows of hers drew down. "I'm not exactly a dewy young debutante, Mom."

I wasn't quite sure what she was trying to tell me. She didn't say any more at the time.

When he brought her back home, after the dance that Saturday, they were still arguing it out on the

doorstep, right under my window. Eavesdropping? Why not? I've got my sense of honor trained so I can tell it where to get off, in a good cause. And I'd been lying awake, after it got midnight, telling myself it was none of my damned business, and worrying, just the same. The first thing I heard her say was:

"Whether I want to go in or not, I think I'd better." (That set me back thirty years or so; I could hear myself saying the same thing plenty of times—and maybe not quite often enough at that.)

Nothing else came up for a minute, and then she said, "Now I *know* I'd better."

He said, "Come on, sweetie. What does being a prude get you? You miss a lot that way."

"I haven't missed much so far," she came back at him. "Ever since I got out of school, I've been up against this sort of thing."

"*You* have?"

"You sound shocked. That *would* be funny. Don't you suppose other men have wanted me?"

"I guess I'm just a boob," he said, and I could tell he was smiling that pink cherub smile at her.

"No," she said. "You're all right, Angel. Good night."

The door closed and I was plenty glad that Juddy was inside, and alone.

Next morning she overslept, which was all right as

it wasn't her day to make the country rounds. It gave me a chance at Loren Oliver that I'd been waiting for. I opened up on him as soon as I'd set his breakfast.

"You knew Juddy's folks," I said.

"Yes."

"What about 'em?"

"Charming and rootless," he said.

"Yes, but what sort were they? What did they do?"

"Nothing and everything."

"Don't give me the runaround, Doc. I'm Juddy's friend."

"I know you are. Well, I think the Judsons were perpetually haunted by the fear that they'd miss something unless they hurried as fast as possible to get somewhere else and do something different. Everything a little in excess."

"That's a heck of an atmosphere to bring up a kid in," I said.

"Yes, I understand she got a little sunburned by the glare of that life."

"What happened? Did something go sour on her?"

"They lost their money, you know."

"All of it?" That was one of the things I was leading up to. I hoped he'd say no. He didn't say anything.

"Juddy'd never let that throw her," I said. "There must have been something else."

He buttered his pancake carefully before he an-

swered, and it wasn't much of an answer at that. "Why do you think there was anything?"

"All this good-by-proud-world tripe," I told him. "I never could see any percentage in that. Not for a girl like Juddy. It isn't natural."

"But she's getting over that, isn't she? Anyway, you must remember that I never knew her."

"You know more about her than you let on. How'm I going to find out without asking?"

"You might ask her," he said.

Well, I ought to have known I wouldn't get much out of that tightjaw.

Juddy strolled in, looking fresh as a dewberry. She gave the Doc a cool nod.

"Still digging, Mr. Oliver?"

"Oh, yes."

"Just what is it you're after, Doc?" I asked him.

"Wandos. An extinct tribe."

"Is that all?" Juddy said, and he looked up at her.

"Quite all," he said. "I've been having some of my finds out for an airing. Would you care to see them?"

We followed him to the stockade. He unlocked the heavy gate to let us in. Inside there was a very small shack, also with a strong lock to it. He didn't offer to let us in there, though Juddy looked hard at it. Rough tables around us were covered with carved stones and pottery and gadgets.

"Idols, these small ones," he said, handling them like they were so many jewels. "Aren't they beautiful work! The larger obloids are Chung-ke casting stones. The old party whose burial urn stands over in that corner seems to have been a tribal champion at the game. I've got his bones in that box."

Juddy huddled her shoulders. "Oof! That's spooky."

"He'll never bother you," the Doc said with a smile. "See all the charms? They're his guarantee of peaceful rest. There are his bow and arrows, his hatchet and club, all laid aside. No more warpath for him. He probably stayed at home and won all the tribe's wampum, casting the stones. Look at the lot of shell gorgets. And these pots, with the animal designs. They're as fine as any of the Central New York Algonkian workmanship."

He opened a lockbox and brought out a stiff and moldy old map and told her that one of her ancestor Mauries was probably on the original expedition that discovered the place, and he showed us a copy of a passage from something he called the Shaftesbury Papers. It read like this:

Our Indians calling out Appala, they withdrew and lodged theire bows and, returning, ran up to ye middle in mire and watter to carry us a-shore where they gave us ye stroaking compliments of ye country and brought deareskins, some raw, some drest, to trade.

"It must have been just above here in the shallows that they crossed," he said. "There was probably a village." He stamped on the earth. "Under us there may be a whole unexplored civilization. Nobody else has touched this. It's pretty exciting."

That's the kind of nut Doc is. Get all worked up over dead Injuns with a live gal in reach, and such a gal! Well, I'm all for a guy that's sold on his own line. But Juddy—I caught her smile: kind of amused and patronizing, let-him-play-with-his-dolls stuff. She asked him:

"How long do you expect to be at it?"

That turned him gloomy. "I wish I knew," he said.

"What's the matter, Doc?" I asked. "I'm not losing my star boarder, am I?"

"I hope not," he said. "But there has been a difference of opinion between the president of the University and myself on scholarship standards."

I'd heard something about that, too. "Football?" I said.

"Yes. There seems to be a feeling that the term tests should be tempered to the shorn intellects of several students, all of whom happen, by a strange coincidence, to be star athletes. I don't share it."

Juddy's eyes snapped. "I suppose you mean Angel Todd."

"Todd's name is on the delinquent list. He is only one of a dozen."

"You'd like to flunk Angel, wouldn't you!"

"Oh, no! It would save me a lot of trouble if he got through. But I'm afraid he is likely to flunk himself."

"Well, I think Angel is a lot more important to Welliver than—than—"

"Than I am? You're not alone in that opinion."

"Well, than a bunch of silly relics."

"Do you mean they're going to ease you out, Doc?" I asked.

"Not quite that, I think. But they might force a leave of absence on me until the exams are safely over."

"And what are you going to do about that?" I wanted to know.

"Carry over the tests to next fall." You could tell by the set of his chin that the president or anyone else wouldn't get much change out of Loren Oliver if he thought he was right. Juddy saw it, too. It got her goat. She said, like a person talking to herself:

"I don't believe there's a more pigheaded, lopsided mind in the world than the collegiate intellectual. Oh, well! That kind can't help but be out of sympathy with the all-round athlete type. It's subconscious jealousy, I suppose."

"That's it," Doc said. "A sad and suffocating sense of inferiority."

Juddy's red showed right out under her tan. "I'll bet you played a dashing game of chess when you were

in college."

"Only fair," he said, looking like a lamb. "Would you like to play some evening?" and I thought she was going to spit in the eye of the nearest idol.

"You're acting like a little stinkeroo, Juddy," I told her. That cooled her off enough to thank Doc for his "interesting Indians"—I swear to gosh he gave me a wink—before she went on about her work.

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Chapter Five

A Skunk in Action

Everything went cockeyed that misty Saturday. First, Dolf got loose and scared half a busload of convention-bound schoolmarms off the premises. Flooey goes fifteen lunches, good for forty cents average, making six dollars the establishment couldn't afford to lose. When I told Dolf where he got off, he turned sulky on me and crawled into a bush, and wouldn't come out until Old Swoby showed up and took him fishing.

Along about five o'clock a load of Florida grapefruit rolled in and Marty Spurgeon, an Ohio boy, that I hadn't seen since 1938, climbed down. He ordered a quart of coffee, and spiked it from his flask. When they do that, it's because they need the sleep and need it bad. Besides, I didn't like his color.

"Marty," I said, "you're sick."

"So what?" he said. "This cargo has to be in Raleigh tonight."

"That's as may be," I said. "Stick out your tongue."

He did. It looked like a second-hand mink tippet. I dug out my clinical thermometer and pushed it into his face.

"One hundred and four," I said, adding half a degree to impress him.

"Okay, Mom," he said. "Trot out the old medicine chest."

They all know my old box. Many a case I've doped up for the gripes or the trots or even the heeby-jeebies. But this wasn't that kind.

"Marty," I said, "it's the hospital."

"Hospital, nuts!" he said. "I guess there's hospitals in Raleigh."

"You'll never get to Raleigh," I told him. "Climb into my car. I'll see your load gets delivered." I knew some truck would be along, driving double, and I could get them to split. Truckies hang together like Masons when there's trouble.

Well, he started to beef, and then he started to cough and in a minute he had both hands to his chest, and his eyes got scared. The chills had struck him. It was pneumonia, all right. They fall for it heavy, these twenty-four-hour drivers. So I boosted him in and wrapped him up, and delivered him at Leverton Hospital.

"Who's going to guarantee his bill?" the little punk at the desk wanted to know.

"I am," I said, and I stuck a fistful of bills under his nose, *and* the fist. "Satisfactory?"

He sort of smelled at the fist. "Yes, ma'am," he said.

"Men's medical," he barked. An orderly came out and wheeled Marty away.

I'll bet I've taken that risk a hundred times and never lost on it but once, and that was a poor guy that died. Not counting what I've got from grateful birds, including a platinum wrist watch, an ivory-mounted .45 pistol, a setter pup, and an annual pass on the Greystone bus line.

Well, I'd done my good deed for the day, and what did I get for it? Trouble. For, if I'd been on the job, maybe I could have headed off that mixed party of four. They came in a five-thousand-dollar limousine dragging the flossiest kind of trailer, a regular plushcart, and made themselves at home. I didn't like the kind of sounds coming from the outfit. Before looking into it, I made the rounds. Dolf was back in his box, smelling of fish as usual after a spell with his pal Old Swoby. Doc was inside the stockade, checking up on his day's take. Juddy was in the Feederia, talking with Maurie Sears, who had developed a Tambay habit.

A swell-dressed bird was peeking under the hood of the high-priced car. He turned around and looked me up and down, and said in a voice to match his dead pan:

"Got anything fit to eat?"

"That's according to taste," I said.

"Four dinners," he said. "The best you got. Served in the car."

A blonde floozie with marcelled hair stuck her head out of the trailer.

"Hey, Bernie! Ask that fat gray witch can't we get some service here," she said. Fat gray witch! Me, Mom Baumer.

The slick boy flapped his hand at her. "Quiet, you," he said. "What about night's lodging?" he said to me.

"If you've got bunks in your trailer, I can't stop you," I told him. "Fifteen cents, please."

"Put it on the bill," he said. "What about that shack over there?" He jerked his head toward Tambay Mansion.

"Dinner, okay. Nix on the lodging," I said.

"Don't waste my time," he said and yawned at me.

"Look," I said, "I'm running this ranch. You aren't our line of trade. This is no bedhouse."

"Yeah? What would you call it? I'll take a look after dinner. If we like it we stay." Then he handed me a fishy stare. "You wouldn't want to start anything in the line of trouble, would you?" he said.

Well, I wouldn't. Not with his kind. I've seen plenty shooting in my day. And I knew this lad was bad. If I'd had a bunch of my truckies there to back me, now, I might have felt different.

The slicker strolled over to the stockade and studied the sign. Doc opened the door.

"Good evening," he said.

"How's diggings?" the guy said. "Struck anything yet?"

"Nothing to interest the public," Doc said, polite enough.

"No?" the slicker said. He tried to stare Doc down. His pal climbed down the trailer steps and joined them. He was a squatty, flat-faced ape in a sports suit.

"What's the matter, Bernie?" he said. "Is he trying to give you a stand-off?"

Bernie said, "We're a coupla young mining men from Broadway and 42nd Street. Ever hear of Broadway, fella?"

"Yes."

"He's heard of Broadway, Fick. We can *smell* gold, up there. We'll be seeing you in the morning."

Doc pointed to the sign. "You'll be wasting your time," he said.

The ape laughed. "Tough boy, heh? We'll be seeing you in the morning just the same."

One of the broads in the trailer began to yell for Bernie. "I wanna cocktail. Do we get ice in this dump or don't we?"

Back of her, the other frilla was using language like it don't do a camp a bit of good.

"Keep your panties on," I said. "You'll get your ice." I'd brought a chunk over from Leverton.

Juddy came out of the Feederia, with Maurie Sears

after her.

"What awful people, Mom!" she said. "You're not going to let them stay, are you?"

Maurie Sears said quietly, "May I handle this for you, Mrs. Baumer?"

"What would you do?" I asked him.

"Haven't you a pistol on the place?" he asked.

"I have, but you don't get it. Why, it's a cinch that those two gorillas have got an automatic apiece, and likely as not a tommy gun stowed away in the trailer. They'd dot you up like a sieve before you got near 'em."

"I don't think so," he said. He didn't, either. You could tell it by the set of his mouth and the hard level of his look. That bird wouldn't *know* how to be afraid.

"Mom's right, Maurie," Juddy said, and put her hand on his arm. All the cold fire went out of his eyes.

Doc came out of his stockade and joined us.

"Can I be of help?" he said.

"Another Christian martyr," I said. "Do you want to qualify for an epitaph?"

"Frankly," he said, "I don't."

"Then stay where you are. This is my show. No heroes need apply."

Maurie Sears flushed up and I was sorry I'd said it. But Doc only laughed.

I sent Nollie to crack up some ice and put it in a pitcher. I carried it over to the plushcart myself. The

two rats got sociable, after a couple of drinks. As soon as I could break away, I came back to my gang.

"What did you find out?" Juddy said.

"Just what I hoped," I said. "The youngest frilla is country bred. That's liable to help. Her name's Minna and she's Bernie's moll."

Juddy looked me over, pretty suspicious. "You didn't have a drink or something in there, did you?"

"I did that," I said. "And it like to choked me."

I got Dolf out of his box and gave him a little soothing talk. I figured that the country gal would likely be impressed when she saw him.

Bernie met me at the door. He took a gander at Dolf, snuggling quiet and peaceful in my arms.

"What the hell is that?" he said.

"A friend of mine," I said and I set him carefully down on the floor, hoping that he wasn't to get hurt. Minna let out an awful screech.

"My God! It's a *skunk!*"

"So what?" Fick said. He was a slum product and didn't know much about the wonders of nature. Neither did the other chappie.

"Throw it out," she said. "I don't like the way it looks at me."

"Nuts!" Bernie said and made a back reach. Minna's shriek near tore a hole in the roof.

"Don't shoot!" She tried to drape herself around his

neck. "Don't, for Chrissake! He'll ruin us."

Well, the bullet struck the floor close enough to jar Dolf. He had been getting uneasy anyway. He was used to polite company; all the fuss and yelling didn't go so good with him. And the shot stirred him up. If there was any shooting, he was going to be in on it. I moved back, for I saw he was going into action.

Did he knock that bunch for a row of shambles!

It was worse than a fire panic. They got stuck in the door, all yowling and clawing like a tangle of cats. Minna came through first and headed for the river, with the rest coughing and strangling and beating the air behind her. There was no fight left in 'em.

Bernie was waving his gat around like crazy, until Doc took it away from him and tossed it over the palings. Then Doc held his nose with his left hand and took the gangster's arm with his right, led him out to the road and advised him to keep going. The ape had fallen over the bank, which was all right, and was swimming across the stream.

We towed the trailer half a mile downwind and left it in a clearing. The camp wasn't too pleasant that night, on account of the breeze being wrong. Doc remembered Bernie's gun, which wasn't an automatic after all.

"What shall I do with this?" he asked me.

"Keep it," I said. "A tourist camp is no Sunday

school. It might come in handy. I'll give you some lessons." He nodded and put it in his pocket.

We saw no more of the coupla young mining men from Broadway, but we heard plenty about that night's work. It was a swell ad for the Feederia and it made Dolf the best-known character in the county.

Chapter Six

Dollars and Sense

Angel Todd blew in for breakfast one morning, looking like he'd slept in the hoosegow.

"Mom..." he said, kind of sad and thoughtful.

"What?"

"I've been thinking. Don't ask me what with—I'm serious."

"What are you serious about, Big Boy?"

"Your little pal. She's got me going. She sure is fast on her feet."

"A girl's got to be, to stay in the same ring with you. And I don't mean wedding ring."

That's when I got my first surprise. "I do," he said. "I'm going to marry your Juddy."

"Sez you!"

"Well, I am. I can't get her out of my mind."

"Kid stuff," I said.

"Kid, nothing. Mom, I'm twenty-five years old."

That was the second jar. "I don't believe it," I said. "Somebody slipped you a phony vital statistic."

"It's true," he said. "You needn't spread it, though. Looking like a freshman is one of my assets."

He gave me a quick sketch of his life. Since high-school days he'd been really a pro under cover. It wasn't false colors, because in those Coast schools where he played, that sort of thing was perfectly kosher. Baseball, basketball, hockey; he was a darb at all of them, but football was his best bet.

"Marriage, huh?" I said. "What do you figure to use in exchange for food and lodgings?"

"Next fall I can be in the money, Mom," he said. "Real money, too. This is under your shirt. Did you notice a slick-looking bird that called me out one night when Juddy and I were eating?"

It happened I did. I hadn't liked the guy's appearance.

"He's a fixer for a bunch that follow championship football. Big-money birds. He hinted around about how easy an end might fumble a pass or miss a tackle or two. Well, I wasn't having any of that. Then he came out flat and said it'd be worth a year's pay if I had to quit football before the Balestier game."

"Haven't you got an agreement with Welliver?"

"Nothing in writing. Anyway, those deals are full of holes."

"I suppose they are," I said.

"Sure! Nobody would expect a fellow to pass up a better offer from another school. As a practical woman, you can see that yourself, Mom."

Well, I could of course. But I doubted whether Juddy

would be that broad-minded. She never had the advantages of a business training. I told him so.

"Have you put it up to her?" I asked him.

Yes, he had. She didn't like the smell of it, he told me. It was her theory, as she'd have said, that it was up to him to stick at Welliver and play the football he was hired to play.

"There's another way, too," he said. "That rat, Oliver, is all set to flunk me in Am. Eth. Suppose I oblige him. That would put me on probation and ease me off the football squad automatically."

"Yes, but how do you know the fixer would come across with the price, after you're safely flunked?" I said.

"That's the catch," he said. "He wouldn't have to."

He rambled on, mostly about how unreasonable Juddy was about some things. She was dead set that he must stick to his Am. Eth. till he'd licked it. She'd got it up her little snoot that Doc Oliver wasn't giving him a fair deal. So Angel's line was to make a monkey of him, by passing the exam. She'd help him work on it evenings.

Oh, yeah? I said to myself. And he'd be working on her at the same time. From Angel's long rigmarole, I didn't make out whether Juddy was for the marriage idea or not. I didn't believe he knew, himself. Maybe she didn't, either.

Anyway, I had an alternative idea for Juddy. And I figured it was about time to spring it. I got an opening the next night.

It was raining hard when the hedgehawk showed up at the Feederia. She was a plump, pink old gal, with pop eyes and an innocent expression which she used in her business. At dinner she asked Juddy could she look around the place, because she had heard a lot about Tambay, which was reasonable enough. Rain or no rain she took her flashlight and went prowling around the old garden, and I could see that bright streak making lines along the earth, like she was down on her knees, spooking under the boxwood hedge and some of the big japonica bushes.

That ought to have made me leery, but it wasn't till I got home after cleaning up that I caught her with her printed contract, and Juddy all ready to put her John Hancock on the dotted line. The boxwood hedge and six of the best japonicas, all for one hundred and twenty-five bucks.

I took the hedgehawk by the slack of her mackintosh and ran her to hell out of there.

"What kind of a deal is this?" I said to Juddy.

"I need the money," she said. "Tambay needs it."

"Don't be a sucker," I told her. "That boxwood alone is good for two thousand smackers, if the right purchaser sees it. You need a guardian."

"I expect so," she said. She let her head go down. "What am I going to *do?*" she said, low and kind of scared.

"Hook up with Mom and make some money," I said.

"The tourist camp?" she said.

"Tambay Tourist Camp. Grade A Lodgings for Grade A Folks. Judson & Baumer, Proprietors."

I got out pad and pencil and gave her a high-pressure sales talk. For five hundred and fifty dollars per unit, we could put up a row of log-and-wattle cabins with hillbilly labor, which is cheap, and quick and good, because the billies build their own houses that way. That figure would include plumbing and furnishing. Add ten percent for error and make it six hundred. To pipe water down from Tambay Spring would spoil a thousand more, and there'd be another grand, at least, in an electric-light outfit and a septic tank.

"How many cabins would we have?" Juddy said. That "we" sounded good to me.

"Twelve to start with. That's going to push a ten-thousand-dollar bill right up against the wall and cut its sweet throat."

She looked me between the eyes. "Where do we get the ten thousand?"

"That's the point, Juddy. How much have you got?"

"A little more than six thousand dollars in the world. Not counting Tambay, and that's mortgaged right up

to the moss on the roof."

"You can't live on the income of that," I told her.

"No, I can't."

"Then what's left to you but to take a chance? Not that you're taking much. This is a sure winner. Cabins like those rent for two dollars, single; three, double. And look what the Feederia will take in. How can we lose?"

Juddy's face was mighty serious. "Have you ever worked out any of these schemes that couldn't lose, Mom?"

"Yes, I have."

"Did they?"

Well, you had to be honest with Juddy. "Some of them did," I said. "But I am still eating three a day."

"How much would I have to put in?"

"I've got five thousand in the sock," I said. "Will you match it?"

She shut her eyes and took a long breath. "Yes," she said.

"Let's go over and see Maurie Sears," I said. "He'll draw up the contract."

He did, too. I'm telling you, it didn't give me any of the best of it. That was all right, too. I knew I could trust Juddy to do the square thing. Maurie was looking after her interest, not mine. At that, he covered me at a couple of points I wouldn't have thought of, in case

of Juddy's death. At our first meeting, the lawyer had rubbed me the wrong way. Now I felt different about him. I've noticed that about ninety percent of people: the better you know them, the more liable you are to find things about them that you like. That's a pretty good batting average for human nature.

Well, Maurie Sears felt it his duty as a gentleman and a Maurie to deliver one brief, sad spiel about the Tambay tradition and how it was being smeared, meaning me. Juddy said:

"I'm sorry, Maurie. But tradition doesn't pay back taxes"—which ended the argument.

On the way back I had an attack of jitters. Or maybe I'd call it conscience if I were sure I had one.

"Look, Juddy," I said. "It isn't too late to backtrack. Say the word and I'll tear up this scrap of paper and forget it."

"What's on your mind now, Mom?" Juddy said.

"It's this way. If this goes flooey, I've still got the Feederia. How about you? Have you got anything to fall back on?"

She laughed, but it wasn't a pretty laugh. "More money than you ever thought of, Mom," she said. "If I want to fall in that direction."

"What's the catch?" I said. "How would you get all this money?"

She looked at me, and then away. "That's it—how?"

she said. "How would you think?"

"I see," I said, though I wasn't too sure. "Well, what's stopping you?" I had a thought. "Angel?" I said.

"That's not a bad guess, either," she said, and laughed again.

"Then we play ball?" I said.

"Yes, we play ball," she said.

After the final wash-up that evening the two of us sat back and built our tourist castle in the air with towers and a moated grange. Before we were through, we had thirty ivied cabins, a big central dining and dance hall with a giftie counter, a cigarette and soft drinkie shoppie, swindleboxes, jookries and all the other nickeltraps, a row of gas pumps, a raft in the stream with bathhouses for the summer trade, canoes for rent, and we'd worked up a banquet business with Chambers of Commerce, Rotaries, and Kiwanises, with a sideline of Sunday-school picnics, all through the countryside.

By midnight the firm of Judson and Baumer were a couple of millionaires.

We rented a truck and ran in a squad of backwoods home builders. Carpenters? They were magicians. Those hillbillies made some passes, and waved a hammer and a saw in the air instead of a wand, and the two rows of cabins came right up out of the earth, complete with plumbing, and all inside of three weeks. They were of unfinished timber off the place, wattled with

asphalt; the kind of thing the tourists call "picturesque" and shuck out an extra dollar for. They may have been picturesque, but they were solid and sound, too. Built-in twin beds. Shower. Washbasins. Toilet. Furnishings plain and good. Auto shelter beside each cabin. Class.

We'd shaded the total cost to a little over six grand. But the outside stuff ran over our estimate. By the time we were ready to open, our combined pile was looking pretty sick. Well, show me any game where you can win a pot without anteing.

The first cabin was rented before it was built. Loren Oliver took it, at ten dollars a week. Juddy didn't like that much. She was suspicious of the Doc. Where Tambay was concerned, she was jealous as a mother cat. You couldn't tell her that Doc's being there was a University proposition, and if it wasn't him, it would be somebody else. To her, he was just a trespasser.

Besides, Angel Todd had tried hard to sell her on the proposition that Doc was a Grade A s.o.b. He didn't wholly succeed. But he did convince her that Doc was determined to flunk him out by fair means or foul. He believed it himself.

Economy was our watchword now. Every penny we could make or save wasn't going to be too much to give Tambay Tourist Camp its start. Well, I soon found out that my notions of economy and Juddy's were two different things. Just as the hillbillies were finishing up,

I heard a gentle scraping under my window one morning. There was Juddy with a cloth bag and a trowel.

"Now what?" I said.

"Bulbs," she said.

"Where did you get 'em?"

"I bought them in Brandon yesterday."

"Yeah?" I said. "I thought we were economizing."

"They only cost five dollars and a half," she said. "And they'll be so pretty when they come out. I can't bear to have the house look so sad and neglected."

"Forget the house, Juddy," I said. "The thing for us to do, before the work gang leaves, is to dig a little deeper and build ourselves a double cabin to live in. Modern and comfortable. Eight hundred dollars would do it."

She opened her eyes, wide and surprised, at me. "Aren't you comfortable in Tambay Mansion, Mom?" she said.

"No, nor you either," I told her.

"I am, too," she said, "except when the wind comes from the north or the rain from the east."

"Look," I said. "There's a dozen windows needing glass. The roof leaks. And a self-respecting sparrow wouldn't have our plumbing in his nest. Cabins are weatherproof."

"Build yourself one, Mom," she said. "But not for me. Leave the old house by itself?" she said. "Why, Mom,

it would wake up in the night and cry for me."

What can you do with a gal like that?

"Juddy," I said, "you're just a plain damn fool." But it's no use being tough with her. She only laughs at you.

So I paid off our hillbillies and they held a whoopee on white mule to celebrate the finish of this job—a swell job, too—and went back home, and Tambay Tourist Camp was set for business.

Juddy was out that night with Angel. They didn't get in till two o'clock, and next day she seemed a little down, kind of bothered in her mind.

"Mom," she said, "you told Angel I was your niece. Why?"

"Just a stall," I said. "He knows you're not."

"Was it because you thought I needed a guardian?"

"I might have then. I've changed my mind."

"Maybe I do. But not as far as Angel is concerned." She stuck a bulb into the hole she'd scooped and smiled up at me. "I've been thinking I'd like to adopt you for an aunt or something."

"That's a thought," I said. "But what do you know about me? I might not even be respectable."

"Are you?" she said. "Not that I care."

"Now I'll tell you, Juddy," I told her. "There's just two kinds of people in the world, those that stay put and those that keep moving on to see what's around the next corner. I'm the second kind. Curiosity is my weak-

ness. Let your nose be your guide and keep close behind it. That's my motto. You have to loosen up on your principles a little to lead that kind of life. But I make out to hang onto my self-respect."

"I'll bet you do, Mom," she said.

"As for taking you on, gals are no news to me. I've had my crack at the family line."

Juddy opened her eyes wide at me. "Have you got children?"

"One," I told her. "And I've taken more chances than that. If I was on oath, I'd have to admit that at times I've veered a little to the left of the straight-and-narrow. But Carnie's strictly legal."

"Carnie?" she said. "Is that her name?"

"Her name is Carnival. We were in that line of business when she was born. I'd run away from a jerkwater Western college that you never even heard of, to marry a jolly sport of a tightrope artist. He was good until he slipped and crocked up his poor back, and then he took up the animals. We hung together till Carnie was fourteen and Baumer was hitting up the bottle so heavy that even his trained seal lost respect for him. A greaser gal in Mexico snared him, which was okay by me."

"Where is your daughter now?" Juddy asked.

"Show business," I said. "She's all right. We don't see each other much. There's reasons. Skip Carnie."

She nodded. I went on.

"After Baumer eloped I carried on awhile with the animal act. One of the cats went batty on me and I got fed up with the smell of the trained seal. So I sold out and went to the wheel. Just wandering. For a year or so I didn't have any more responsibility of character than a sheep tick. Then an old yen for cooking that I'd always had hit me again. All of which adds up to the Feederia."

Juddy sort of sighed. "Aren't you going to find it dull and stagnant here after all that?"

"There's things to be said for a camp too," I said. "Instead of going along with the big show you watch it roll right up to your door. All those folks that you know nothing about, dropping out of nowhere into your life for a meal or a night. I've had people die and get born right in the shadow of the grub wagon, and I've seen hate and love and the meeting of sweethearts and the break-up of families, the whole human show. From the great deep to the great deep they go, and every now and then you see something that makes life look bigger. Excuse me waxing eloquent on you, pal."

"I like it," she said.

"Well, if you think I'm the kind of aunt you can use, I'm your aunt," I said.

"You've bought yourself a niece," she said. "You're adopting Tambay too, you know."

"What I don't quite get," I told her, "is this yen of

yours for Tambay. You never saw it till a few months ago, did you?"

At first I thought she was going to crawl behind that curtain that she drew in front of herself every now and again. She didn't. After a pause she said:

"Yes, I was here when I was a child. It's the only place I've known that had any permanency for me. You see, Mom, my life was—well, perpetual motion. My parents never kept still; always on the jump. How they ever found time to have me, I don't know. So Tambay, where I could stay put, was heaven to me. I didn't cry easily when I was little, but I cried for a day and a night when I had to leave. Other things have happened to me since; nothing ever pressed on my heart quite like that."

It made me a little sick, that did. What had I let her in for? If the camp turned out a flop, Tambay was done for. But then, it was done anyway. She couldn't carry it long on her six thousand; not with her peculiar ideas of economy. Unless, of course, she took that money waiting in the background.

I did some wondering about that.

Chapter Seven
The Lynching

Loren Oliver wasn't Juddy's only worry about Tambay. Sheriff Hollister Mowry was now one of our regular customers. Juddy didn't like him for nuts. He'd drop in for lunch, sometimes for dinner, and sit around with that silly, fat grin of his, dishing out local gossip and trying to pump us about Tambay in general and specially on what was going on inside Loren Oliver's stockade. He tackled Oliver, too, but it got him nowhere. Doc was polite enough to him, but there it ended. As for Juddy, she just walked out on the fat man whenever he showed up.

He put up a little plaint about it to me. What was the matter with her, to be so stand-offish? All he wanted was to help us; we might be glad of his help one of these days.

"How's that, Sheriff?" I asked him.

"This Professor fella," he said. "What do you figure he's up to?"

"What do *you?*" I said.

"He's right secret about it," he said. "It don't look good to me. There's something going on inside there."

"What's your worry?" I said.

"Family feelin'," he said. "I ain't the man to stand by and see my kin cheated by a Yankee. Any gold that comes out of there belongs to Tambay."

"Well, I haven't seen any come out," I said. "Have you?"

He winked and tapped me on the knee. "I've read the lease," he said. "It runs out this fall. Then the ground reverts. As a businesswoman, Mrs. Baumer, you can appreciate that when the time comes, I can be of use. On a business basis, of course."

Right there I made my mistake. "Sheriff," I said, "we're only a coupla poor, footless females, but I kind of reckon we can run our own business, just providing people don't interfere."

Well, he didn't take any offense. Not openly. "I'll be seein' you soon, Ma'am," he said.

It was too soon. That very afternoon, in fact, he was back at Tambay. Not to see me, though. He was down by the river, putting Old Swoby over the jumps, and the little man trying to understand him, and Dolf sitting up and watching them and nobody getting anywhere till I showed on the bank.

"Glad to see you, Mrs. Baumer," he said. "Maybe you can make this loony understand that I want to know whether he's seen a hurt nigger coming down the stream bed?"

Swoby shook his head when I put it to him.

"No," I said. "What's up?"

"A killing," he said.

"Who killed who?"

"You wouldn't like the details. The nigger got away into Tawney's Tangle."

"That's a good three miles from here."

"We think he came out this way and is breakin' for the big swamp."

"I haven't heard anything about it."

"Warn your people at Tambay Mansion, will you? The nigger's shot through the shoulder. One of my boys got him, but the bullet went too high.

Well, I hated to tell Juddy. I knew how she felt about such things. However, she was bound to know. Going across the road, I noticed a lot of activity in the air around the Hanging Tree. It looked like all the buzzards in the county were holding a conference. The two Gullah girls were in the woodshed talking with Uncle Andy, the old darky that Juddy had hired from town; their voices were low and close. I asked Uncle Andy if there was something dead down by the turn, where the tree stood. He began to shake. He said:

"No, Miz Mom. Not yet." It gave me a nasty jar.

"What do you mean, not yet?" I said.

Nollie started whimpering. "Them buzza'ds yeddy the news."

"They yeddy it an' they waitin'," Ollie said, and *she* began to snivel.

"Stop it," I said. "What would they be waiting for?"

"I ast my God!" Nollie said. She wrapped her arms around herself, Gullah fashion, and began crooning a bit from one of their praise-house songs:

"Sinnah-man, sinnah-man, yeddy yo' doom.
The yearth ain' nothin' but a silent tomb."

Uncle Andy shook his white head. "Them mean birds don' bring no good to black folks. They do spells."

"Get Miss Jane Ann's gun and I'll spell 'em," I said. But they raised such a moan at that, that I saw it wouldn't do. I told them to calm down and forget it.

On thinking it over I decided not to say anything to Juddy. Let it rest till morning.

The weather broke bad, shortly after sundown. By ten-thirty I figured there wouldn't be any more trade for the Feederia and I could go back to the mansion and hit the hay. The night was full of wind and the noises of wind. It went by me like the rush of a big river. Twice I thought I heard voices, far away and high-pitched, but I guess it was only in my mind's ears. It's easy to imagine things in the roar of a great gale.

Juddy was at the window in the big room.

"Why aren't you in bed, kid?" I asked her.

"I was waiting for you," she said. "Listen."

The old house was groaning and grieving like a sick old lady.

I sat down and took off my shoes to ease my feet. After a while Juddy said:

"Something has happened, Mom."

"What makes you think so?"

"The girls. They're terrified. Do you know what it is?"

"You won't sleep any better if I tell you."

"I won't sleep anyway. Not with the house trying to talk."

So I told her what little I knew. She drew a slow breath.

"If they catch him," she said.

"They won't catch him. Not tonight. Not in this storm." I believed it, too, because I wanted to believe it.

I must have been more tired than I thought, for I dropped off pretty soon after denting the pillow.

The quiet woke me up with a jump. The gale had gone dead. I began to shiver, with a sound in my ears that I hadn't heard since the old days in the West. There's something about the hoofbeats of a lone horse, going full gallop across country in the dead of night. I sat up in bed with all the muscles of my neck pulled taut, listening for more. It didn't come.

After awhile I dozed off, and this time I came up

slower out of sleep. A line of motorcars was going past. Their lights made a pattern on the lawn as they eased around the curve. Then there was one single, high, crazy voice, shrieking short and quick, as unhuman as a mechanical whistle, yet enough to turn you sick with the terror and despair in it.

My door opened. Juddy came in.

"They've got him."

"Yes, they've got him."

"Get dressed."

She was quicker than I. I was still fixing my sweater when she came back.

"Somebody's on the veranda," she said.

She put her head out the window and called. Doc's voice answered her.

"It's Loren Oliver. Let me in."

I ran down, with Juddy close after me. The two girls were huddled under the stairs, crying. Doc came in and barred the door after him.

"What are you going to do?" Juddy asked him, quick and fierce.

"I tried to telephone the troopers," he said. "The wires are down."

She tried to push past him. "Let me out," she said.

"What for?"

"I'm going to the tree."

"Don't be a fool, Juddy," I said.

I doubt if she even heard me. "Are you going to let me pass?" she said to Doc.

"No," he said. "It's no place for a woman. You couldn't do any good."

She stamped on the floor like a furious child. "This is my place," she said, her voice high and shaky. "If *you're* afraid to go out there, don't try to stop me."

"Sorry," Doc said. "But you're not going into that mob."

She slipped past him to the corner and grabbed up her twelve-gauge.

"You're not going to prevent me," she said.

His face was white and tired, almost as tired as his voice.

"Oh, be sensible!" he said, which was good advice, but not the way he said it.

She was trying to raise the gun. For a minute I was sick and dizzy. You can't tell what hysteria will drive a woman to do. Doc said in the tone of a casual suggestion:

"I'd put that gun down if I were you."

That awful voice outside split the air again. Then the mob began to yelp. There was a rattle of shots. Juddy went over and sat on the stairs and buried her face in her arms. A red glow showed through the window and spread and lighted up the sky.

"You might as well be going," I told Doc.

"I'll wait outside," he said. "Some of them are drunk."

The crowd melted away. I got Juddy to bed. She wouldn't speak to me. Her hands and feet were icy and every now and then she'd stiffen all over. I got her fixed up with a hot-water bag and went outside.

"I want a doctor, Doc," I said. "This thing has got her."

"There's old Starrow at Brandon," he said. "We can stop a car."

A few were still moving on the road. We went out and signaled one. A man lurched forward from the rear seat. It was Maurie Sears. He was drunk. Had to get that way, I reckon, to nerve himself up to that business. He turned his face away. I'm not sure he knew me. The lad at the wheel was sober. He said he'd be glad to fetch the doctor.

The old boy was there in half an hour. He went at Juddy like he knew his business, shot her full of dope and told me to keep her out of commission for a few days.

The local way with a hanging was to leave the body swinging for an example until the authorities got around to it. Everybody knew about this but Old Swoby. He did what no darky would have dared to do: cut the body down and buried it in a corner of the bluff above Tambay Stream. It was the instinct and sym-

pathy of the persecuted, I reckon.

There was some beefing and threatening when the white trash of the country and the young toughs of the town found out about it. They're always the lot that raises the trouble. Who the hell was this Old Swoby? Probably half nigger, himself; his skin was dark as a mulatto's. You never could tell about these damn greaseballs. He'd better watch his step.

It worried Doc. He fixed up a place for the little man to sleep, inside the stockade. The trouble blew over. But Doc oiled up the gangster's rod.

Chapter Eight
THE "SPOILED DARLING"

JUDDY MOONED around like half her joy in Tambay was gone. Sometimes I'd catch her staring down the road toward Tambay Tree and see the shudders take hold of her. Nothing would make her go that way. If she had an errand in Brandon, she'd detour a mile and a half through the rough woods road. After all these weeks when I'd watched her adjust herself, getting young and warm and soft and gay like she was meant to be—well, it made me sick to see her slipping back.

Any day it wouldn't have surprised me to have her pack her trunk and walk out on Tambay, and me.

Then all of a sudden she shook herself one day and got back into harness. It was this way. I'm pretty husky, but the rate that business was coming in, I was hardly getting a chance to eat or sleep. Then the good old reliable digestion slipped a cog, and I came down to breakfast green around the gills. Juddy came out of the fog and gave me the careful eye.

"Mom, you look tired."

"Well, I am tired."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. Just that I've been doing double work except Sundays when I make up for it by doing triple. Don't give it a thought."

She mulled over that awhile. Then she said, "My theory is that I've been acting like a heel."

"Argue it yourself," I said. "I'm too tuckered out."

From that minute my partner took hold like a bull pup. She threw in Ollie and Nollie and Uncle Andy and trained them into an efficient working team. In a week we were handling our regular business, easy, and readying up for the commencement crowds that would be coming on.

Where Juddy got her commercial savvy from, I never could tell you. Must have been in her blood. She cooked up a snappy little circular and spread it over a picked list for a hundred miles around. She subscribed to a lot of newspapers, and whenever she read of an excursion coming our way, whether it was a visiting basketball team or an Elks outing at the islands, she sat down to the camp typewriter and two-fingered out a boost for the Feederia. Rotaries and Chambers of Commerce she contacted personally. To meet the commencement rush, she bought the tent of a medicine show that blew up in Brandon and rented cots from the armory. Our accounts, when I could find time to figure them, made sweet reading. I said to her:

"Ideas, you've got 'em, all right, pal. More of 'em

pan out than I'd have thought, too."

"An idea a day keeps the sheriff away," she said. "Or am I wrong, Mom?"

"You're wrong," I said. "He was here yesterday. We had a soul-clutch."

"What did he want?"

"Family stuff," I said. "Believe it or not, that ancestral bastard has got you on his mind. He's worrying about your virtue."

"What business is that of his?"

"Pride of the House of Tambay and all that. He thinks the family on-nah is in danger and that Angel Todd's the triple threat to the Maurie scutcheon. It's the sheriff's opinion that Angel's a hellion with the gals."

"If that's all he came for—"

"It isn't. He's all fussed and flustered over Doc and the diggings. In his opinion, the Wandos are so much bull and Doc is really after gold. He tried to pump Doc. You can figure how much that got him."

"Yes, I wouldn't say your friend Oliver gives out very much. Particularly about his secret operations."

I didn't like the way she said it, but you couldn't really blame her, at that.

"What about the triple threat?" I said.

She sort of smiled. "Angel's good for what ails me," she said.

It's a fact that since she had the grumps, he was the only one who could make her snap out of it. She wouldn't go out with him, but she spent plenty evenings with him in the mansion. The theory was that the two of them were working up the Amerind Ethnology course. Well, maybe they were; I wouldn't know. Anything that kept her from brooding about Tambay Tree was all to the good.

At that, I figured they must have put in some honest toil, for when the Am. Eth. test came on, Angel went through it like grass through a goose. Juddy was tickled pink: I doubt if she'd really expected him to lick the exam. I was pretty pleased, myself, and thought I'd have a little fun, needling Prof Loren Oliver when he came over for his lunch.

"Nyah, Doc!" I said to him.

"Okay, Mom," he said. "I'll bite. Nyah! So what?"

Association with me has certainly broadened out Doc's vocabulary. Improved it for the worse, as you might say.

"Angel Todd passed his test in your subject, I hear," I said.

"With the greatest of ease," he said.

"So what kind of a thissenthat does that make you?" I asked him.

"Todd's term standing has been below fifty. He passed his test above ninety. What kind of a thissenthat

does that make *him?"*

That jarred me. "Are you telling me he pulled a phony?"

"What do *you* think?" he said.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Send in his paper to the Board in regular course."

"What happens then?"

"Nothing, probably. It will be passed over. In the interests of the Higher Learning. We need a good right end."

"Don't be bittah, Doc," I advised him. "It's no skin off your nose. Go and dig a Wando and forget it."

After he'd left, Juddy came in and started to rack the dishes.

"Was that Loren Oliver that just left?" she asked me.

"Yes."

She dried off the last plate with special care and put it in place before she spoke again.

"What has he told you about me?"

"Nothing," I said. "Except a little about your folks."

She stopped and thought some more. Her face was drawn. "All right," she said. "Come on, let's go over and see him."

Doc put down his hand trowel and came to the gate. She opened up on him.

"Did you write Hendy Kent that I was here?"

"Certainly not," he said, and pretty sharp at that.

"I've had a letter from him. Someone must have told him. I naturally thought it must be you."

"The agile chamois," he said. "No conclusion too wild for a jump."

"Who's Hendy Kent?" I said.

"My husband," Juddy said.

The only thing I could think of to say was, "Oh, yeah?"—which didn't seem to fully cover the ground.

"I haven't seen Henderson Kent for several years, you know," Doc said to her. "I never knew him well in college. He was the gilded youth of the place until he flunked out. Did he continue to be a highflier?"

"The highest," she said. "I tried to fly with him. It didn't work."

"What was wrong?" I asked.

"I was. In ever marrying him."

She said, "I haven't been young since. I grew up in that month."

"Did it only last a month?" I said.

She nodded. "That was plenty."

"You knew all about this?" I said to Doc.

"Not all. Part."

"And never opened your face to me?"

"I thought that if Mrs. Kent—"

"Please!" Juddy said.

"—wanted you to know she'd have told you."

"I've been meaning to," Juddy said. "I kept putting

it off."

"Now that I know you," Doc said, "I can't understand your getting into it at all."

She answered him, but she was talking more to me.

"The good old competition motive. He waved an emerald hoop in front of me and my theory was that I'd better jump through it before some other girl nosed me out. It wasn't all that, though. He was gay and good-looking and had all kinds of superficial charm and knew all the patter and the double talk and the café-society clichés. I thought that was life. But there wasn't anything behind it. All the time, I knew there wasn't."

The Doc shook his head. "It doesn't fit in with my picture of you," he told her. So he'd been carrying a picture of her in his mind, had he! I don't believe she noticed that, but you bet I did. She said:

"It's simple. At that age and in the set I ran with, you think: 'Oh, well! what the hell! Why not give it a try? It doesn't have to last. And it won't change anything.' —But it did. It changed me. And I don't like the change."

"Yes," Doc said. "You can't alter the structure of a life without changing the texture."

"Anyway," she said, "I got bored. I got so bored that it was a case of quit or the river."

"At least the venture should have been profitable," he said. "Kent had a great deal of money, hadn't he?"

She looked at him thoughtfully. "The cynical bluff doesn't go well," she said. "No, it wasn't even profitable."

"Pardon," he said. "I assumed that money was the consideration."

"So it was. Just another smart saleswoman; a little too smart. I took his money for being his wife. When I stopped being his wife, I couldn't very well take his money any longer."

"Atta sport!" I said. "Then you're not married to him any longer."

"I wish I knew. He used to write me three or four times a week, drunk or sober, trying to get me back. Then, for a change, he'd talk Reno. I hope he went. Now he's threatening to come down here, but I don't suppose he will. He never does anything he says he's going to do."

"It seems to have been a losing venture all around for you," Doc said. "Unless you count experience as gain."

The girl looked past him into nothing. "Not even that, in a way," she said, but more as if she was talking to herself. "The whole thing was a flop." I knew what she meant, but I don't think he got it.

" 'Let men tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win with it the utmost passion of her heart,' " he quoted. I made a note of that one. Good, snappy quotations are a specialty of mine. "That sounds pretty out-

moded, doesn't it?" he said. "Yet there may be something in it, even today."

She came back at him with another. "'Lucius, romantic love is on the rocks.' That's the 1940 version."

"Did you come down here to run away from him?" I asked.

"From everything. I wanted to get far enough away to look at things without squinting."

"To see life steadily and see it whole?" That was Doc.

"That's the bunk," I said. "How can you see life whole, unless you've got eyes all over you like a fly? And who wants to, anyway? It's hard enough to take in small portions."

"Things are so muddled," Juddy said. "All I wanted was to be happy." She said it just as though it was the most reasonable wish in the world.

"Is that all?" I said. "Page your fairy godmother. Did you ever happen to notice, pal, that the sun very seldom shines on both sides of you at once? If your front side is warm, your back side is cold. That's what's known as the law of compensation."

"Well, I've got all over expecting too much," she said.

"Don't let yourself," Doc said to her, kind of quick and anxious. "When you give up expecting too much, you give up your youth."

She studied him for a bit and there was a sort of smiling surprise in her look. "You haven't given it up?"

she said, half questioning. "I keep forgetting that you were the same time as Hendy."

"It's my stuffy, professional manner that makes me seem so old," he said. "Mom is trying to cure me of that."

When we came out I said to Juddy, "Does Angel know?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"What difference does it make?" she said. "You don't understand about Angel and me."

"Are you sure you do?" I said.

"Yes, I'm sure enough," she said. That was all of that, for the time.

Shortly before commencement, a bunch of Chi Rho Gamma alumni came over for a week-end conference; something to do with a new wing on Rogues' Hall. There was a little dinner party at my outdoor oven. An undergrad committee was there, and Maurie Sears as chapter counselor, and Loren Oliver because he was on the faculty Buildings Committee. At the end of the dinner, they invited Juddy and me over for coffee and a drink.

At first she balked. But I was for anything that would get her back into circulation. So we went over, and she settled in quietly and naturally beside Angel Todd.

Everything was sweet and lovely till a whiskery old

gazabo who looked as if he had been left over from the class of 1840 brought up the lynching.

"There was one when I was in college," he said. "Tambay Tree was green then."

Doc Oliver tried to shush him, for Juddy had got white and twitchy around the mouth, but the old boob didn't get the point. He burbled along:

"They say the Tree bears fruit three times in every ownership."

Juddy gave a sort of cry. "Not in mine," she said.

The old geezer began to mumble an apology. I tried to switch the talk, but Angel crabbed it. He put on that cherub grin and said:

"Ask Brother Sears. He goes to all the rope parties."

Maurie Sears darkened up. "I don't care for your choice of words, Todd," he said.

Juddy said to him, "I think it was horrible of you to be there. A brutal, inexcusable mob murder."

Poor Maurie looked as if she had hit him. "Do you know what the man had done, Cousin?"

"Don't tell her that," Doc said, quick and sharp.

"I hadn't intended to," Sears said. "Being a Northerner, you don't—"

He didn't finish that. She turned on him too quick. "Why don't you say 'Yankee' and be done with it! I can't stand that sickening you-all-No'theners-don't-understand stuff."

"Button it up, pal," I said. I didn't like the way things were shaping.

Angel did. It was right up his alley. "It's a pity there wasn't a man on the place that night," he said. This time he was staring straight at Doc Oliver.

"What could one man do?" I said.

"I'd like to have been there with a few of the team," Angel said. "Anderson and Karpak and Zieglitz and Bones Smith."

"Oh, if only you had been!" This from Juddy.

"What would you and your young friends have done, Mr. Todd?" asked old Brother Whiskers.

Angel laughed. "Chased that bunch of hangmen so deep into the swamp they'd have had to be dredged out."

Wat Smith, next to Angel, jabbed him in the ribs. "Skip it, you damn fool," he whispered. "This is a party, not a brawl."

The old party had bristled up. "I'm afraid that Welliver would have had to get a new football team. Have you ever heard of a justified lynching being stopped in these parts?"

He talked like he was defending a cherished institution.

Doc jumped in. "Yes, I have," he said. "This is—not justified. Personally I believe that no lynching is justified. This one was stopped by"—he smiled—" 'an aged

man, two lads, a narrow lane.'"

"Shakespeare," I said. "Shoot, Doc." I could feel the tension loosening up.

"Right here at Tambay," he went on, "several years ago. There had been a particularly brutal murder on one of the plantations. There was no plain clue, but an old Negro man had been seen pottering about the place. He had always been a harmless old fellow, but when they caught and threatened him, he was too terrified to explain what he'd been doing there. That was enough for the mob. Word reached a dinner party that the old fellow was being taken to Tambay Tree. There was an old gentleman there for whom the Negro worked. He excused himself from the party. Two other guests followed him, boys of seventeen or eighteen. Their horses were outside. They got to Tambay only just in time. They rode their horses through the mob, took the rope from the praying Negro's neck, and faced around with their pistols in their hands. Nobody stopped them. They brought their man out safe. Weeks later the real murderer was caught."

"Who were the rescue party, Doc?" I said.

"Ask Maurie Sears," he said.

Angel had put his lip in.

"Pity you didn't show a little of the same spirit the other night, Prof," he said.

"That'll be about enough from you, Big Boy," I told

him. "This party's over. We're closing for the night."

Juddy left Angel and went over to Sears. "Who was the old man, Maurie?" she said.

"Great-uncle Rantoul Maurie. He's right much of an old fire-eater and afraid of nothing on earth."

"And you?" She smiled at him. "And the other boy, whoever he was?"

"My cousin, Elliot Maurie. We couldn't let the old gentleman ride alone."

"No, you couldn't. And yet— Oh, I'll never understand you people! But Maurie, I'll tell you one thing. If that ever happens again at Tambay I'll—I'll hate the place so that I'll leave and never come back. Never!"

He said very quietly, "Then it must never happen again, Cousin."

I caught Wat Smith before he got away and asked him why Angel had made such a dead set, first for Maurie Sears, then for Loren Oliver.

"There's hell to pay over that Am. Eth. exam," he said. "Angel's paper bounced right back and smacked him in the jaw."

"But I thought he passed it."

"Passed it? I'll say he passed it! The big show-off! Instead of just easing through, which would have been reasonable, he had to go and turn in a ninety-plus paper."

"Just what Doc Oliver said, then; it was too good to

be true."

Juddy came up in time to hear this, which I hadn't meant her to.

"He'd never give Angel a break," she said. "I think it's rotten."

"It isn't Oliver's doing," Wat said. "The Student Council got onto it and put Angel on the carpet. Maurie Sears is alumni representative on the Council. He put some questions that got Angel sore, and the big boob walked out on them. So now he's got to take the exam again, next semester. At that, he got off easy. If we had another decent pass receiver in college, he'd have got his bumps. But is he sore!"

"The spoiled darling athlete complex," I said.

"Oh, give him a break," Wat said, pulling the loyal frat brother stuff. "Angel's all right. It's a wonder he isn't worse spoiled with all that's been handed to him. He'll snap out of it."

"Of course he will," Juddy said, giving me a dirty look. "You've all got it in for poor Angel."

"Okay," I said, "it's your baby. If you like the way he behaved tonight, you can have him."

"You don't understand, Mom," she said.

"Look, Juddy," I said, "I'm only an old hasher, but I know class from selling-plate stuff. This bird won't do! —not for you. I don't want to see you get hurt, kid."

She came over and took my hand and rubbed her

cheek against it.

"Okay, Mom," she said, "don't worry. I'll pull out of it. It isn't what you think anyway."

Chapter Nine

Reported as Accidents

Commencement came and went, and gosh! how the money rolled in. The overflow started early and we never rightly caught up with it. Every cabin was taken, double, for the duration. We filled the medicine show bigtop that Juddy bought, at six bits per night per cot with breakfast and could have sold out another if we'd had it. I put in two extra outdoor ovens and threw together half a dozen emergency tables, and hired all the spare help in the township. We even had Old Swoby in an apron.

Three hundred and seven dollars and sixty cents was the week-end take. Juddy was too busy to get to any of the dances, and that made Angel sore. He was getting to think he owned her. As it figured out in my arithmetic book, the less she saw of him now the safer. I didn't want her beating it with him before she knew whether she could marry him, nor after, for that matter. If he got the permanent boot from Welliver, I was good and scared she'd do that thing.

Angel landed himself a nice-paying job, being a summer resort mash athlete, what they call a camp director

for the book, a couple of hundred miles to the west. A couple of thousand wouldn't have been too far, in my opinion.

The Big Lad came to the Feederia to say good-by. He hadn't been able to get any line on developments in the Am. Eth. business, and that made him savage.

"You know what I'm going to do if I'm heaved, Mom?" he said.

"Look up a softer graft somewhere else," I said.

"I'm going to take that Oliver punk apart and scatter him so far they'll never collect the pieces."

"Don't run any unnecessary risks," I begged him. "Remember, he's pretty near half your size."

"I wouldn't blame Angel much, at that," Juddy said.

She was sure sold on the proposition that the Am. Eth. Department was unfair to football.

Instead of going slack after commencement, business kept right on being good. There were conventions and tours and club dinners. Juddy's work as a mail-order puller-in was bringing results. The new cabins were more than carrying themselves, and the Feederia ledger was a sweet sight.

Money is bad for my system. I'm not used to it in big gobs, and it goes to my head like liquor. My partner is no better. Both of us were suffering from financial delusions of grandeur. We were sure singing at our work these days.

Besides what we were taking in, each of us had a little of our original capital left, Juddy in the bank, me in the sock. Nothing would do us but we had to make our dream of the big central dinery and dance floor come true.

Well, before we knew it, the old place was full of high-priced carpentry noises. No hillbilly labor this time. Those birds are swell wattlers, but they can't handle important stuff. Costs began to pile up so fast that we were afraid to look at our weekly sheets. Fast as the cash was coming in, it was going out faster. I caught my partner stewing over the ledger.

"Let's face it, pal," I said. "I know it's worse than we thought it would be, but how much have we let ourselves in for?"

Juddy bit the end off of her pencil. "Well, say six thousand, minimum."

"You say it," I said. "I'd choke. We must have been drunk with prosperity."

"What'll we do now?"

I had one of my brilliant flashes. "What's a bank for?" I said. "We can take our books down to Old Man La Rue at the Leverton National and after he's seen the profit figures he'll lend us the buttons off his pants. Any banker would."

So we put it up to Maurie Sears. He didn't seem too taken with the notion.

"I'll see what can be done," he said.

His report was a sock. The bank didn't yearn for our business at all. Neither did the Second Commercial.

"It looks to me like Hollister Mowry is blocking it," he said. "He's right influential in both banks."

"What's his idea?" I said.

"You know he's got the gold fever, don't you? He'll be after those diggings as soon as the Welliver lease is up. I'm surprised that he hasn't been after you with a proposition, Cousin."

"He has," Juddy said.

"And she gave him a bawling out for not stopping the lynching party," I said. "He went away, looking like his family feelings were hurt."

No money from the bank then. When we were back in the car, Juddy said:

"Any other ideas, Mom?"

"The only thing I can think of is for you to marry a millionaire," I said.

"I did," she said. "Look what it got me."

"There's others and maybe different," I said. "You're the kind of gal that men chase with a check book in one hand and a wedding certificate in the other. I don't know what you do to 'em, Juddy. You're no Helen, the original Miss Troy. You've got something, though, that knocks 'em worse than being just pretty. I guess it's that you're so hell-fired alive."

"It's possible to be too much alive, Mom."

"Yeah. No millionaire then?"

She took a long time before she answered. "I could always go back to Hendy."

"Well, what's the matter with that, after all?"

"I've been fighting against it. You don't know how hard I've been fighting it, Mom."

That was a surprise. "Have you still got a yen for him?"

She shook her head. "No. But I never was cut out for being poor. Every morning when I wake up and look at Tambay Mansion, I call myself a fool for living this way any longer. By evening, I'm loving the place so that I can't bear to think of leaving it. It's Tambay against Hendy. Tambay and you and—" she stopped.

"Angel?" I said.

She gave me that queer, slanted look again. I couldn't make out whether she nodded or not.

"Angel wouldn't be any help to the payroll," I said. "We've got to be practical. I'll let the crew go as soon as the floor is done."

At that, it didn't work out so badly. We had a swell dance floor that brought in a nice additional piece of cash every pleasant week-end. When it rained, we protected it with the tent canvas Juddy bought.

It was nearly a month before we saw Angel again. He'd got a week-end leave to come back to Welliver,

and stopped in late Friday evening. The first thing he said was:

"Where's Juddy?"

"Gone to bed."

"That's a hell of a note," he said. He sat down and started ordering everything on the menu.

"Hey!" I said. "What's the answer? Have you broken training?" I could tell by his breath that he had.

"Just for once," he said. "The diet they got me on over there would drive a canary to the breadline. You haven't got a little snort handy, have you, Mom?"

"Sausage with scrambled eggs, you get 'em," I told him. "And that's all."

After he'd eaten, he said, "I want to see little Juddy."

"No, you don't. Not in your condition. You wouldn't do yourself a bit of good with her."

"Then let's pry Oliver out. I've got some things to settle with that rat."

"Listen, Angel," I said. "you beat it for Welliver. You don't want to get yourself in wrong. Come back in the morning."

He gave me the baby smile. "Good old Mom!" he said. "Mom's right. Mom's always right. On your way, slob."

Sometimes I'm just a plain sucker. I thought I had him fixed. So I closed the shop and hit the hay.

A tattoo on my window woke me up. It was a thick,

foggy night, but the dim figure in the yard couldn't be anybody but Angel; it was too big. He called to me in the soft, sad, pleading voice of a dog left alone in the house.

"Let me in, will you, Mom?"

"I thought I told you to go home?"

"I tried. The car's gone flooey. Couldn't I bed down on the sofa for the night? I'll be good."

"Get along. Thumb yourself a ride," I said.

"Nobody'll take me. You wouldn't blame 'em if you could see me."

He sounded sober enough now. I hustled into a robe and went down. Juddy called to me, but I didn't answer. I wanted to look first.

Angel was a picture. One of his eyes was closing. There was a smear above his cheekbone, and below it the flesh was pulpy. Across his chin ran a gash. His right ear was mottled with blood. All down one side his clothes were mud-caked.

"My God!" I said. "What did you tangle with? A truck?"

Juddy showed up at the stairhead. "What is it?" she said. Then, *"Angel!"*

"Hello, sweetie. Come and view the ruins."

She ran down. "You're hurt! Was it a collision?"

He managed a smile in spite of a bulge in his upper lip that would be called a salient on a war map. "Just a

little argument," he said. "You ought to see the other fellow."

"Get my first-aid kit, Juddy," I said. "Keep your finger out of that eye, Angel. Where is this other lad?"

"In the riverbed, I guess," he said. "You can have him, Mom."

"What would I want of him?" I asked, working on the ear.

"Well, he's a friend of yours," he said.

I stopped the work. "Why, you big heel!" I said. "Not Doc Oliver!"

"Parfetty-mah, as we say in French class."

"That's fine," I said. "That's swell. That's my big, brave lad." I was good and sore.

"Well, he hit me first," he said.

"You're a liar. What would he do that for?"

"Don't, Mom," Juddy put in. "Give Angel a break. What did happen, Angel?"

"When the old car pooped out on me, I wasn't feeling too good. It kind of came into my head to tell Loren Oliver just what I thought of him, with illustrations. I piped him out of his stockade, but we didn't get very far with the conversation. Boy, is that bird prompt!"

By this time I'd finished my patchwork, and told him so. Juddy said, "Take my car and go back, Angel."

He didn't even try to stall. "I guess I'm in plenty of trouble," he said when he kissed her good night. It

looked to me like he was too.

We got a flash and started our hunt. It didn't take long to locate Doc. He was in the stream bottom, leaning against a boulder.

"Good evening," he said. There wasn't much gimp in his voice. I hated to turn the light on him, for fear of what I was going to see.

It wasn't like that at all. Not a mark on him except one slight bump, low on the jaw. But he was a mass of mud, and his eyes blinked as if he was half awake. Juddy went to him.

"Are you all right?" she said.

"Quite, thank you," he said, and straightened up. But he'd have flopped, sure, if she hadn't caught him on one side just as I got to him on the other. By the way he gasped, I was pretty sure what the trouble was.

"Ribs?" I said.

"I'll be all right," he said. "Don't bother."

We got him up the bank to his cabin, and a job it was. He put up a squawk about my undressing him, but I told him he could keep his modesty for a more romantic occasion, and chased Juddy over to the house for bandages and hot water.

While she was gone, I put together some of the details.

"Kept slipping him and shooting your left, huh?" I said.

He sort of grunted.

"That's a boxer's trick," I said. "You never learned that stuff digging Wandos, Doc."

"I used to box some in college. It isn't necessary to say anything about this outside, Mom," he said.

"I think he was a pup to leave you down there," I said.

"No," he said. "That was all right. I told him to. Until I found I couldn't climb the bank, I didn't think there was anything wrong."

"There's a couple of ribs wrong, by my guess," I said. "It's a doctor's job." Juddy came in just then. "Will you drive him over to Dr. Starrow's, or will I?" I said to her.

"I will," she said.

She had him back in an hour, strapped up neatly. When she came to my room there were those small lines between her eyes that always made me think of a baby in trouble.

"How do you like your hero now?" I asked her. I was still sore.

"I don't believe it was his fault," she said. "There's something queer about it. Do you know what Loren Oliver said to Dr. Starrow?"

"How could I? I wasn't there."

"He told the doctor he lost his way in the fog and fell over the cliff."

"And what did the old boy say to that?"

"He looked at Loren's swollen left hand and sniffed and winked at me and said, 'There's more to the life academic than is generally realized, Miss Jane Ann.' "

"Uh-huh," I said. "And what did Doc have to say to you, himself."

"Nothing. He wouldn't talk."

"Maybe Angel can get away with it yet," I said. I didn't care whether he did or not, except that I was still afraid Juddy would follow him if he got canned out of Welliver. "I believe Doc is figuring it's bad medicine, getting into a scrap with one of his own students. Undignified and all that. So it'd be to his own interest to keep it dark. He gave me a steer in that direction, and his covering up with old Starrow makes it all the stronger."

"It's a bright and shining thought," Juddy said. "My theory is I'd better see Angel before he gets any deeper in the soup. Can you drive me over in the morning to pick up my car?"

We caught Angel before breakfast call. He spoke up light and airy as a breeze.

"Better pack the keister, honey," he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Allan A. Todd will be northward bound in search of a job muy pronto, followed by the boots but not the good wishes of the faculty."

"Not necessarily, Angel."

"What's the idea? Aren't you coming with me?"

"Perhaps you're not leaving."

"After last night? What an optimist!"

"Wait and see. You haven't told anyone, have you?"

"No. But what's the use? They're not going to believe that I got these alterations to my map at a church sociable."

"My theory is," she said, "that your car tipped over and rolled down a bank."

"Yeah? And what's Oliver's theory? How's he feeling?"

"It's about time you asked," I said. "We had to take him to a doctor."

"He told me to be on my way, so I thought he was okay. Who'da believed he could put up such a scrap! Come to think of it, I did hear he played football at Penn."

"Chess," I said.

"Skip it!" Juddy said, quite cross. She told Angel our angle on his chances. He shook his head.

"He'll get me, all right. He feels I've insulted his pet Wandos. And he's the kind that never lets up on a grudge. Look at that snapping-turtle face."

"I think he's got rather a nice face," Juddy said, and then looked kind of surprised at herself.

For a week after that Juddy was absent-minded. My guess was that she was fretting over our financial status.

Then I wondered if she didn't have Angel on her mind. Of course he'd be out on his ear if Doc Oliver chose to report the fight. Not a word out of Doc on the subject though. But he did ask me whether Juddy wasn't feeling well. Not much got past that bird.

"She'd feel better," I told him, "if she knew whether you're going to be a sport or not."

"Definitions differ," he said. "Hers and mine might not be alike."

"Are you reporting Angel Todd?" I asked him.

"I've told you, the examination matter is out of my hands."

"Examination, my foot! I'm talking about your little argument with him."

"Oh, that! That's a private matter. Besides, I hit him first."

"Sure!" I said. "And the ant socked the elephant in the puss for making faces at him."

"When you know you've got to fight, it's the best plan," he said, passing up my crack. "Particularly if the other fellow is bigger. Tell Todd that unless he talks I certainly shan't."

When I passed that on to Juddy, she said, "I'd like to kiss Loren Oliver if I didn't think it would scare him out of a year's growth."

"You lay off that lad, Juddy," I told her.

Chapter Ten

Disarming a Man

Next term's prospects didn't look too favorable for Angel. The Examining Board sidestepped by returning his Am. Eth. paper marked "Unsatisfactory." That handed him the exam to take over again, and on top of it gave him the whole term classwork to make up.

If you ask me, Angel was getting off light. Well, from the yip he put up when he got the sad tidings, you'd have thought they'd given him a year on the rock pile. Take it from him, no innocent, well-meaning young fellow ever got a dirtier deal from a bunch of old mossbacks with no notion of sportsmanship. He came over to weep on my shoulder.

"They had a right to go easy on a team man," he said. "Balestier does, and all the other schools. Look! We football men have a lot of extra work wished on us. I don't mean just the practice. Brain work. Blackboard exercises. Learning the combinations. It's as bad as higher math. I'll bet there's a lot of these Phi Betes that couldn't keep up with it. We're entitled to some consideration in our classes. Most of the profs are reasonable. They give a player a break. But not Oliver."

"His course isn't so hard, if you really work at it, Angel," Juddy said.

"Maybe not for you. I've got no appetite for dead Injuns. And besides the classwork and the exam, I've got to write a thesis."

"There's an idea!" she said. "Loren Oliver's report on his excavations must be out by this time. Why don't you write your thesis on the Tambay discoveries?"

"That's a female notion, all right," I said. "Spike him on his own hatpin."

Angel quite brightened up to it. He confided to me that he was going to lick Oliver's Wandos, and get hold of some money, and *then* he guessed Juddy would marry him.

"Has she told you she would?" I asked him.

"No," he said. "But why wouldn't she?" He certainly wasn't hating himself any.

Football practice started in before fall term opened. The talk was that Angel Todd was showing more stuff than ever. I've always been a grid fan; so I'd slip away occasionally to get a line on the team. I thought I might lay a few smart bets on the big game, which was against Balestier.

The Wellivers looked good to me. They were long and rangy, except in the middle of the line where they had plenty of beef. They coasted through their early games, showing plenty against light opposition, until

they met Harstrom College. It was supposed to be just another warm-up.

Well, every coach knows there are days when a whole team goes sour for no reason at all. The sketch that our boys put on against a bunch at least five touchdowns below them in form was a vaudeville skit. They mixed their signals. They ganged up on their own interference. Their tackling would have disgraced a nursemaid on a park bench, and their running game was patterned after Wrong-way Corrigan. When they tried to pass, you'd have thought the ball was a greased pig. They were lucky to get a thirteen-thirteen tie. The coach ran out of words at the end of the first quarter, and out of the ball park at the end of the half.

Was Angel sunk when he came over to dinner! I tried to jolly him that even if Welliver got licked in an early game, civilization would manage to stagger along, and anyway he wasn't any worse than the rest of the bunch of thimblefingers who had taken part in the calamity.

"I was just as bad," he said. "Coach ought to can us all and buy a new team."

"He hasn't got the price," I told him. "And it's goofy for a man of your age to go teary over not winning one little game."

"Winning games is my business," he said. "How else am I ever going to get anywhere? If Welliver has an undefeated season and we grab off a bowl bid, I'm a

good bet for All-American. Then a pro job. Or I might get into coaching. That's where the real money is. And now look at the mess!"

Juddy produced her Onward Christian Soldiers act. "I've got confidence in you, Angel, if you haven't in yourself. Want me to prove it?"

"How?"

"There's three hundred dollars in the bank that I can spare." I must have gasped at the lie, for she gave me a dirty look. She could spare nothing. We were both on our uppers. "I want you to put down two hundred of it for me and the other hundred for you on the Balestier game."

"What's the idea?" he said. "Are you trying me out? Or is it a bribe to keep me from quitting?"

"My theory is that I'm about as subtle as a bass drum," she said. "And I thought I was being cagey."

"You needn't be afraid of my not sticking, as long as you're here," he told her. "I'll put your money down. There ought to be nice odds after that Harstrom slump. And I'll win the bet for you or break my damn neck."

"You'd better," she said. "I guess we both need the money."

They dated up to dine together the next Friday at the Leverton Inn. I had some bed linen to shop for, so I said I'd drive Juddy over and Angel could fetch her

back. Along about five o'clock, we ran into Watrous Smith. He was jumpy.

"Seen Angel anywhere?" he said.

Juddy said, "He's meeting me at the Inn in an hour."

"Not if we catch him first! The gang has been hunting him all over the place."

"Why? What's happened?" I said.

"The damn fool tangled with Maurie Sears."

"Has Angel been drinking?" Juddy asked, quick and anxious.

"He hasn't. But Sears has. He's in the Rice Club now, liquoring up. He's got a gun. We've got to get Angel out of town."

"Can't you have Maurie arrested or something?"

"In this town? Not a chance."

We went on the prowl for Angel and ran into Doc Oliver. Juddy told him.

"That's bad," he said. "Where is Sears?"

"At the Rice Club. Know anything about it?"

"Yes; it's a joint. Sears wouldn't be there if he were sober."

"Do women go there?"

"Not your kind."

"But you could take me in, couldn't you?"

"I'd rather not."

"Please," she said. "I'm sure I can handle him."

Doc rubbed his chin and thought. "Let me try," he

said.

"Be careful," I said. "He's got a gun."

I don't know if he even heard me. "Do you know Carling's Restaurant?" he asked Juddy.

"I do," she said. "It's on the next corner, west."

"Both of you go there. Get a booth near the door. I won't be long." He tipped his hat and left.

"Did it occur to you, pal, that you're sending that bird on a risky errand?" I asked Juddy.

"Why, no," she said. "Besides, I didn't send him."

Well, I might have known it wouldn't occur to her. If she thought of Doc at all, it was just as something convenient or inconvenient, according to circumstances.

It was a long wait at Carling's; all of five minutes that seemed like twenty, before Doc joined us. "I've got his revolver," he said. "He's getting washed up."

Maurie Sears came in. His face was gray and stiff. He walked carefully.

"Hello, Maurie." Juddy spoke as if nothing had happened. "I've ordered hot coffee for you. Then you're going home."

"No," he said.

"Please! Because I ask you."

"I've got a matter to attend to."

"Can't it wait?"

"He put his hands on me, God damn him!" he said. "I beg your pardon, Cousin. And yours, Mrs. Baumer."

He gloomed at Juddy. "What is your interest in this?"

"I don't want anything to happen. To either of you; either you or Angel." It would have been better if it had come quicker, that last.

"Never mind me," Maurie Sears said. "I don't count. Not with you. I know that."

"Don't say that, Maurie; it isn't true."

"It's true. I know. I know you're in love with him."

Doc jumped in his seat. "Are you?" he said, like it was forced out of him.

It came so sudden that Juddy and I just stared. I was startled, but Juddy's look was different. What possible concern was it of his?—that's what her expression meant.

"That saves his life," Sears said. "I'd have killed him on sight. Now I can't. You may return my pistol, if you please," he said to Doc.

"Certainly," Doc said, and handed it over.

"You will excuse me now," Maurie Sears said. And, by thissenthat, if he didn't make a drawing-room bow to all three of us. "I am sorry to have caused any alarm. Perhaps you will advise Mr. Todd to keep out of my way. Good day."

"Whew!" Juddy whiffed as the door closed. "Take me somewhere and get me a drink. I'm wobbling."

We went to the Inn. Angel didn't show up. The others had run him off. So she went back with me, and

just as well, too, for we were both jittery. I never could get used to gunplay.

The news flew around town and didn't lose anything as it went. One version was that Maurie Sears had been mussed up by the football ace and then had his gun taken away from him by the college prof who was living over at Tambay. Another story was that Oliver had tricked the lawyer out of his gun, and Todd had then beaten him up, and that the girl over at Tambay was mixed up in it someway. That wouldn't be the end of it, folks said, and shook their heads. Not with Maurie Sears.

Chapter Eleven

A Touch of Conscience

Every day in every way Sheriff Mowry was getting folksier and folksier. Having in mind Maurie Sears's tip, I didn't discourage him. At that, it took him plenty of time to get around to the point he was always hinting at. He opened up by being worried about Loren Oliver.

"Tell that star boarder of yours he'd better watch out," he said.

"For what?" I asked him.

"Lawyer Sears."

"Baloney!" I said. "Doc and Maurie are all right."

"He took Sears's gun away from him, didn't he?"

"If he did, it was all perfectly friendly."

"Maybe it looked like it to you. But something is liable to start Sears to mullin' and sullin' over it. Then watch out."

"I guess the Doc can take care of himself," I told him.

He shook his fat jowls at me. "I'm tellin' you, ma'am. Maurie Sears is a perfect gentleman when he's sober. Get a few drinks into him and he's right mean to handle. There's killin' in our Maurie blood when it's stirred up." He made a quick switch. "You're a business-

woman, ma'am."

"So what?"

"You're overlookin' a fine proposition right here under your feet, or don't gold interest you?"

"It might if I believed in it."

"It's there. Look at Oliver. He knows."

"He never said anything to me about it if he does."

"No. He's had his face buttoned up. They've told him, over at the U, that if he gives out anything about his findings, he'll get the boot. That's what makes him so slit-mouthed. I've got my lines of information. I'm tellin' you, ma'am, it's gold, not Indians, that he's diggin', and you and me ought to be in on it."

"Okay," I said. "I'm interested now. How do we get in?"

"You get my little cousin to cut me in for a percentage. We'll get rid of Oliver. I'll handle the political end, and see that you get yours. It'll be worth it to both of you to have me with you."

"What would you figure was a fair cut?" I asked him.

"Twenty-five percent."

"Is *that* all?"

"I'll kick back five percent to you. Look—I'll kick back seven and a half percent."

"Don't strain yourself, pal."

He gave me the fishy eye then. "Think what it would be worth to you to keep out of trouble," he said.

"Uh-huh," I said. "What kind of trouble?"

"You never can tell, can you?" he said, squinting at me. While I was mulling over it he picked up his hat.

"Put it up to your partner, ma'am," he said. "Make her see reason. You don't want any interruption to your trade, just when everything is goin' so good."

Well, I didn't want to pester Juddy with it then. But I did pass on what Maurie had said about Doc Oliver. Juddy got in touch with Wat Smith and Van Clark and found them worried about Sears and Angel Todd. There was a rumor around town that Sears had been drunk again and had threatened to shoot both Angel and Oliver. So Juddy and I decided to wise up the Doc. He looked puzzled.

"Why, I saw Sears only yesterday," he said.

"How was he?" Juddy said.

"Perfectly pleasant. A little reserved perhaps. But that's his way, isn't it?"

"Was he sober?" I said.

"Perfectly."

"Did you manhandle him when you took his pistol?" Juddy asked.

"Of course not."

"How did you work it? You never told us."

"There's not much to tell. I warned him that he was going to cause a lot of trouble. The revolver was beside him on the bar and I put it in my pocket. I remem-

ber that he looked at me pretty blackly for a moment. But all he said was, 'You're going to have a drink with me' as if it were of vital importance. I said 'Certainly.' When I told him you were waiting down the street, he braced up and I had no further trouble, as you know."

"Loren Oliver," Juddy said, "sometimes I suspect there's more to you than meets the eye."

"And look, Doc," I said, "this is a rough world we're living in. You and I are going to have a little target practice out back."

Well, Doc was a natural with a pistol. In a week he could nick a four-bit piece at thirty yards. That's nothing wonderful. But most shooting that you really need to do is less than thirty yards.

Angel wasn't around so much, these days. After the Harstrom slump, the team settled down to work and showed something. The betting on the Balestier game went back to evens, but I had my little fifty down at five to seven, and Angel got four hundred for Juddy's three. If we lost I figured we'd be eating Spanish moss off the trees the rest of the year.

Reservations began coming in early for the week-end of the big game. It looked like beating out our commencement business. Then one morning a couple of young fellows with rods and chains came in and ordered eggs, cakes, and sausage.

"What goes on, boys?" I asked, after I'd served them.

"State survey."

"What for?"

"The new bridge."

"What d'you mean, the new bridge? That's to cross half a mile downstream."

"Nothing's settled," one of them said. "But there's some talk that this would be a better place."

"Like hell!" I said. "They can't do that to us."

Well, the two lads had their orders. They finished up and left me with a sick feeling in the region of my breakfast. Curtains for Tambay. That's what it meant, if true. You can't run a tourist camp under a bridge abutment. I could smell a smell of Mowry about this.

With only a week to go before the Balestier game, a pair of barriers sprouted right up out of the earth overnight, a mile on each side of us, and detoured our traffic. "Road Closed for Temporary Repairs." That was the reading matter. Repairs, my foot! I got the ax and tossed those barriers into the ditch. Then they got me and tossed me into Brandon jail. After a while Sheriff Mowry came around and passed me out.

"I wouldn't have had this happen for a million dollars, ma'am," he said, solemn as a hoot owl.

"Is that your price now?" I said. "You've gone up. But we could talk."

"You'll always find me reasonable."

Well, I wouldn't say but what a hundred dollars was reasonable enough for calling off the detour till after the big game. But that was no guarantee that eventually the bridge wouldn't put us out of business. I could guess Mowry's price for that; the twenty-five per cent cut of the mining rights. I'd found out that the head of the Highways Department was his brother-in-law. He certainly held good cards.

Juddy was having her troubles, too. She showed me a letter from Angel.

Sweetness:

This is tough. I will not be seeing you again till after the game. It can't be helped. They have got me income-you-know-diado. I don't mean the police. It's Coach. Don't worry. I love you and we are going to lick them. That's why. I mean, I'm going to show you. Hold out a big one for me and don't worry about me. I'm all for you.

Angel.

"What do you suppose it means, Mom?" she said.

Wat Smith furnished the answer when he showed up that evening. She tackled him.

"Can you find Angel for me, Wat?"

"Not at the moment."

"I want to see him. It's important."

"So's the Balestier game."

"I'll say it is," I said. "We win or go over to the hock shop."

"But why can't I see Angel?"

"He's otherwise engaged. Maybe you hadn't heard, in which case control your start of amazement. Angel is scheduled to play in that game."

"Really? How nice! And how pleasant of you to explain it to me! There's nothing wrong then?"

"You've got a mean, suspicious nature. What should there be wrong?"

"Wat, if you're going to be that way, I shall drive over and go to his room and sit there till I see him."

"Thereby getting him fired. There's a good old Baptist rule about wild women in the dorms." He sized up Juddy's chin, which was moving forward. "I believe she means it," he decided. "Well, what do you think is wrong?"

"I don't know. He wrote me not to worry. That's what worries me."

"A-plus in logic. Did he ever mention a man from Miami to you?"

"The gambler?"

"Right. He's back. Raised the ante to fifteen hundred. Angel took a poke at him. Not wisely but too well."

"I'm glad he did. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Commendable but unsafe. Someone took a potshot at Angel when he was coming back from somewhere the other night. Tambay, I

wouldn't wonder."

"Angel's been shot?"

"Calm down, Maiden. Shot at. Maybe not even at; maybe just toward. I think they're trying to get his nerve. A couple blackhand letters have come to him. So Coach Harley isn't taking any chances on his prize package. Angel's too valuable a property. Now, you tell me something. What fell on Oliver at Tambay, one night?"

"He was mooning around in the dark and fell down—"

"And Jill came tumbling after. I've heard that one, too."

"Then why ask me?"

"In the futile hope of eliciting some facts. I'll bet he tried to make Mom and she bopped him one." He grinned at me like an ape.

"Never mind about me," I said. "You concentrate on getting those tickets over to us."

Angel had got us swell seats on the fifty-yard line, with a bunch of the Rogues. Of course I'd no business going. One of us ought to have stayed by the camp. But I couldn't resist that game. Besides, I wanted to watch what was happening to my fifty.

We were early in our seats. Doc Oliver arrived and sat right below us. There was the usual lot of chitchat passing around about the game; the Balestier boys were

out for manhandling, mayhem, and murder; they were going to make hash of Angel Todd; two men were assigned to him—three—four. Everybody had something to say about Scallinger, the Balestier left tackle.

"He's a dainty little piece of goods," Van Clark said. "About the size, build, and temperament of a rhinoceros."

"Is that the one that plays opposite Angel?" Juddy asked.

"Not opposite, my beautiful," Rags Owen said, "but unpleasantly near. Our pride, our joy, our bearish boy is in for a busy afternoon."

When the visiting team came out, they looked like bad news to me. I'd say they outweighed us on the line by seven or eight pounds per man, and their backfield was no bunch of debutantes. The Wellivers looked pretty good, too, when they took the field. Angel spotted Juddy and gave her a handwave. Juddy was as excited as a schoolgirl.

The first quarter was a darb. I'm no sports reporter, and anyway things happened so fast I could hardly keep up with them. Those Balestier lads had the stuff, all right. Most of the play was on our side of the field and Man Mountain Scallinger was doing his share of it. Angel wasn't showing anything sensational. It worried Juddy. She kept squirming and saying:

"Why don't they give the ball to him? Why don't

they give him a chance? I think it's dumb."

I tapped Loren Oliver on the shoulder. "Our young lady, here, isn't satisfied with the way things are going," I said.

"What's wrong?" Doc said. "Oh, Todd? He's taking good care of himself."

Juddy got red. "D'you mean he's shirking?" she said. "I think that's a rotten thing to say."

"I didn't say it," Doc pointed out to her. "You haven't seen many gains around his end, have you? On defense, they're keeping an extra man on him. That relieves the weaker left side of our line."

Nobody scored that quarter. It looked like the same thing in the next until toward the end. Then Angel, who took a pass and had just about got into the clear, was tackled so hard by Scallinger that he lay there, out. The Welliver stands began to yell for blood.

"Dirty! Dirty! Run him off the field. Take him out!"

Juddy was in the chorus, hammering the nearest object in front of her, which happened to be Doc Oliver's back. He turned around.

"What's the matter now?" he said.

"Kill him," Juddy yipped. "He did it on purpose. Kill him!"

"Of course he did it on purpose," Doc said. "It was a perfectly fair tackle. That boy is a player."

I thought Juddy was going to choke. They took

Angel off. Three minutes later Balestier got their touchdown on a cross buck and kicked the goal. I heard a moan back of me. It was Van Clark.

"There goes our ball game," he said.

"There goes my fifty," I said

Doc said, "This game isn't over yet."

Between the halves an assistant coach came up to him and asked if he would talk with Coach Harley in the dressing room. Juddy's eyebrows went up.

"What's all that about?" she wanted to know.

"Coach probably wants his slant on the game," Van said.

"Why should he?"

"Because Oliver knows plenty football. He invented the split tandem when he was in college."

Juddy looked as if she didn't take any stock in it. "What's the split tandem?" she said.

"It's a chess opening," I told her.

"Oh, can it, Mom!" she said. I could tell she was sore on everything. Worrying over her three hundred, too, I wouldn't wonder.

Doc came back with the news that Angel was all right and would start the next quarter. Scallinger gave him a grin as he took his place, but it wasn't the sort of welcome I'd have liked.

It was a seesaw with no advantage for maybe ten minutes. Then, with our side having the ball, there was

a complicated, hidden-ball play with Angel way out like a pass receiver, and then sprinting across to block for Ramsdell who came down from nowhere and was pretty well in the clear. Big Scallinger was on the job, and turned him, and just then Angel dived plum into Scallinger's belly as another blocker took him on the side. Down he went in a soft spot, and this time he was the one that didn't get up. Angel got an arm under him and heaved him to his feet.

Scallinger was a picture. His knees were wobbling, and you couldn't see his features for mud. Angel was dabbing at it, to clear it away. At least, that's what it looked like from the stands. I thought I saw something else, though, that I hoped the umpire didn't see. All of a sudden the big gorilla jerked away and made a wild swing at Angel. Angel ducked and grinned at him and patted him on the back. Meaning, of course—he don't know what he's doing, poor guy!

They took Scallinger out, fighting, while the Welliver crowd was yelling for his blood again. He looked as if he was crying, too. Van Clark, next to me, had his field glasses on the mix-up. I whispered to him:

"Did you see what I saw then?"

"Yes," he said. "Forget it."

While this was going on, Ramsdell was strolling across the line like a schoolmarm out for a walk. Maybe it came too easy for him. His kick for the extra point

was a mile wide—and he hadn't missed twice before in the whole season. So there it was, seven to our six. Was I sick for my fifty and Juddy's three hundred!

Angel played like three men, after that. But the luck had set against Welliver. Every time the boys were on their way, a fumble or a penalty set them back. The count was still against us when the game went into the final quarter, though we'd kept the play consistently in enemy territory. It looked lousy. Then with only two and a half minutes to go, and our fourth down, we had an outside chance for a drop kick.

The stands were yelling for Angel Todd. But Angel was shaking his head, as Ramsdell talked to him. Afterward we found out that he'd hurt his right ankle and didn't dare risk the kick. So a tow-headed sophomore named Klink trotted out, cool as a hog on ice, and put the ball square between the posts and the game was in the bag. But, for once, Angel wasn't the hero in the limelight.

Doc Oliver turned around to us with that pleasant, sort of impersonal smile of his. "Well, what did you think of it?"

For someone who had just cleaned up a nice pile, Juddy was no ray of sunshine.

"I wanted Angel to have more chance," she said.

"Say, gal!" Van Clark leaned across to her. "The business of a linesman, in case you haven't been told,

is to outplay the other guy."

"Of course. But—"

"Angel outplayed two opponents half the time and kept three plenty busy at odd moments. Isn't that right, Mr. Oliver?"

The Doc nodded. "I haven't seen better end play since Brud Holland. There's a professional scout from the Magnates here. Todd is likely to hear from him."

We all went over to Rogues' Hall for a drink. There we ran into the Magnates' representative.

"The big boy, here, sure did a job on that truck horse of a tackle," he said, patting Angel on the shoulder.

"I thought it was rotten, the way he tried to hit Angel when Angel was trying to help him," Juddy said.

"Help him, huh?" The scout gave a hoot. "I'd hate to have anyone help me that way. Why, he rubbed enough dirt into that Tarzan's eyes to load a dump-cart."

"Angel! You didn't!"

"Why, Juddy," he said, "he'd have got me if I hadn't got him."

"You mean he tried to foul you?"

Angel laughed. "What's a foul when the umps isn't looking! Be sensible, sweetness. With Scallinger in there, we didn't have a prayer after their first score. Somebody had to put him out so he'd stay out. Isn't that right, Mom?"

"Depends on the point of view," I said. "As a business proposition, I'd say you're right. And I expect football is more business than it is anything else."

"Sure, it is," the scout said. "And a damn good business to be in. That's what I've been telling Angel here."

"Well, I think it's rotten," Juddy said. "It takes all the fun out of winning my bet."

Angel put on his coaxing way. "Come on, honeybunch," he said. "Don't go prissy on me. Let's just the two of us go out to dinner somewhere and you'll feel better about it."

"No, I don't want to, Angel," she said. "I'm going to Tambay."

Instead of taking it on the smile, as I expected he would, Angel got cocky. Could you blame him for feeling his oats?

"Okay, if that's the way you feel about it," he said. "I'll jog into town and get myself a snootful of celebration. Training's off, and I guess I've got it coming to me."

I think he had, at that.

We didn't see him for several days. I totted up the accounts for the week-end. We'd taken in close to three hundred and seventy-five dollars. Besides, there was Juddy's four hundred, and my fifty on the game. We could thank Angel for that.

Again I was singing at my work. Juddy wasn't. She

felt bad about Angel, when he didn't show up. Maybe there was a touch of conscience in it, too. She sure had been tough with him about the game.

Chapter Twelve

The Hollywood Girl

Tambay was shy another regular. Maurie Sears wasn't coming around any more. It got me to thinking. All his friends laid off him about the mix-up at the Rice Club. But there was a bunch of small-town rats that hung around the corner, and I heard they'd taken to sniggering and passing remarks when Maurie went past. One of 'em was a big loafer named Bixie Groff. He had a reputation for knifing niggers, and had spent half his twenty-first year in the pen.

Bixie thought it would be smart to take a crack at a swell like Maurie Sears who, generally speaking, wouldn't so much as spit downwind in his direction. He braced him one morning, as Maurie was going past, with a hunting crop in his hand he was taking to the repair shop.

"Hey, Searsy!"

Being funny, of course. That kind of scum don't make themselves folksy with Mauries and Searses and Rantouls. His gang gave him a laugh for it. Maurie stopped.

"What did you call me?" he said.

"*Mister* Sears, to you. Got your gun back from that Yankee?"

Maurie moved toward him, and he backed up. "Don't you hit me," he said.

His hand went to his belt, but he didn't get far enough to do any harm. The hunting crop cracked down on his wrist, and the knife rolled into the gutter. One of his pals started to pick it up.

"Leave it there, Bantry," Maurie said.

"Yes, sir." None of the bunch was laughing now. Bixie was mouthing over his fingers.

"Look at his hand. Is it broken?"

Bantry examined it. "It looks right queer, Mr. Sears."

"Take him to Dr. Starrow. Tell the doctor the bill is to come to me. Has anyone else anything to say?"

There wasn't any answer, except Bixie's sniffles. He'd had enough.

That served notice on Leverton that Maurie Sears wasn't safe to fool with. The bad part of it was, though, that it started the talk up again. Old Uncle Rantoul Maurie, who was eighty-four and ought to have had more sense, went shuffling around town saying that in his day any damyankee who tried to disarm a gentleman wouldn't have lived long enough to say his prayers. At the Feederia, if I heard it once, I heard it twenty times from talky customers that it was only a question of time when Sears would get lickered up and

go on the warpath of honor.

Juddy didn't take it as seriously as I did. She joshed Doc about it.

"Why don't you borrow Dolf for a police dog?" she said. "He likes you." It was true, too; Dolf and Doc got on fine together.

Doc didn't even answer her. He said, "Do you think I should apologize to Sears, Mom?"

"What for?" I said. "You didn't do anything to him."

"I've hurt his feelings apparently."

"Are you afraid?" Juddy said.

"Of course I'm afraid. I'm not a fool. I have no ambition to be shot."

I guess Juddy had never heard that tone out of him before. She had it coming to her all right. She colored up.

"You've got your own gun," I said to Doc.

"Yes. But I don't want to shoot anyone. Certainly not Sears."

"Most likely he'll bump Angel off before he comes after you," I said. This was to Juddy's address. She batted her eyes. She didn't like it too well.

One thing about Angel's absence struck me. Allowing that he was sore at Juddy about the razz she gave him over the game and was holding off on that account, I still didn't see why he hadn't sent the bet money

over. Well, I found out soon enough, and right from headquarters.

Angel showed up, looking like something the Salvation Army had salvaged. All the zizz and sparkle was out of him. No, he didn't want anything to eat, and he wasn't looking for Juddy. He wanted a private talk with me. We went down to the river. It was private enough there, because an airplane had just gone over, scaring Old Swoby into the stockade, and Dolf was covering his retreat. Angel hemmed and hawed and sweat.

Finally he got it out.

"Mom, I'm in a hell of a jam."

"What's it about now, Big Boy?"

"Money. Got any to spare?"

"No. How much?"

"Seven hundred dollars," he said like a dying swan.

I can add three to four. "The bet," I said. "Juddy's bet. You big heel!"

"It wasn't my fault."

"It never is."

"When she passed me the ice pitcher, I went on the razz. Somewhere I met up with that bunch of Miami tinhorns and drank a lot of champagne and stuff and when I came to, I had just ten dollars and sixty cents in my jeans. They must have rolled me."

"Yeah?" I said. "Was it dice, draw, or dominoes?"

He let out a groan. "What does it matter now! The game was crooked. Mom, I could pay you back sure in two-three months."

"I haven't got any seven hundred dollars," I said. "And when I get it, it goes into the building fund."

He put his head between his big hands. "How'll I ever square it with Juddy?" he moaned. Just then Loren Oliver came out of the stockade with his hand on Old Swoby's shoulder. Angel looked over at him and dropped his voice. "You could get it from him, Mom," he said.

"Yeah?" I said. "Which one?"

"I'm not joshing," he said. "Oliver. He's got plenty. You're pals with him, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said. "But he'd have a right to know what it was for."

Angel thought that over. "Let him," he said. "He'd better not start anything. I've got plenty on him."

"You're crazy," I said.

"Well, if I haven't, I will have. Enough to can him out of his job."

He was so cocksure that I got uneasy. I didn't like the smell of it. But neither did I like the idea of Juddy losing her money. As for Doc, I didn't worry so much, for I figured that Angel could make good on the loan. There was probably a football deal on that would bring him in some ready cash.

"Run along, little boy," I said. "I'll pull you out of this hole. But it's the last."

I went over and stood in front of Doc and looked him in the eye.

"Doc," I said, "what would you do if I told you I needed seven hundred dollars?"

"Let you have it."

"Just like that? Without knowing what, which, or why?"

He didn't look at me. "We're friends, aren't we, Mom?" he said.

"Doc," I said, "you're a funny guy. I don't get you, at times. But, speaking man to man, there aren't a hell of a lot of people in this more or less lousy world that I think more of than I do of you."

"Cash or check?" he said. He was like that. Take a personal slant and he'd go shy on you.

This was my day to be personal, though. "Cash," I said. "And that isn't all. You aren't doing right by the Feederia lately. Have you gone sour on my vittles?"

"No, Mom," he said. "They couldn't be better."

"Then what's the matter? Tell Mom."

"There's nothing the matter." But he wouldn't look at me.

"Listen, Doc. You haven't gone and fallen for Juddy, have you?"

"She's in love with Todd. You heard what Sears said

that day."

"I didn't hear her say anything, though."

"She didn't deny it." He tried to smile. "Strange as it may seem, she doesn't even like me."

"Get this, Loren Oliver," I said. "Juddy's a pretty wise guy about a lot of things. But her own self isn't one of them. In her present state I wouldn't be too sure of anything about her. However, don't let me put ideas into your head." Which was exactly what I was figuring to do.

Angel got his nerve up and owned up to Juddy about his drunk. Of course, he didn't say anything about the money; just handed it over. It went right into the building fund and sank without a bubble. His explanation was all right with Juddy; she didn't ask any embarrassing questions. She even became more friendly with Loren Oliver, which Angel didn't like too well, though it was no secret that she'd be tickled pink when the Welliver lease was out and she could clear away the stockade. I don't believe she had any suspicion of how Doc felt about her. Somehow, he didn't shape up that way in her natural-history book.

It took a movie queen to alter her views. Lolita Marquesas was billed in Cherrington, only a hundred miles away, for personal appearance with *Spanish Love*. Angel Todd brought the news.

"Look me over," he said to Juddy and me. "I'm the

most important guy in Welliver University."

"Stop hating yourself, Angel," Juddy said, "and tell us what it's all about."

Well, it seems that last year Lolita had been chosen Star of Chi Rho Gamma, and she was coming to pay a visit to the Mother Chapter and Angel was chairman of the committee of escort to go and fetch her.

"We're throwing a swell dinner for her at Rogues' Hall," he said. "You're invited—both of you. Friday at seven. Evening dress."

"Thanks," I said. "Movie stars are no treat to me. I been in show business myself." Besides, I had other reasons for not going.

"I'd love to go," Juddy said.

Naturally Angel couldn't come for her, having the Marquesas on his hands, so he sent a harmless freshman. But he brought her home himself. They were so full of the occasion that they came busting into my room at 3:30 a.m. and sat on the edge of the bed, telling me all about it.

"What do you know!" Angel began, and Juddy pushed in with, "Who d'you think the star made a play for?"

"Prexy Gilchrist," I said. "They always shoot for the biggest game on the preserve."

"Not this time," Angel said, and Juddy chirped, "Loren Oliver!"

"No!" I said.

"Would you believe it!"

"God save the king!" I said. "What did she want of Doc? And how did she catch him?"

Angel did the explaining. "Some of the boys were ragging me on the way back from Cherrington about Tambay and somebody mentioned your Feederia, Mom, and Lolita piped up and said, 'Feederia? What's that?' So Rags Owen told her about Mom. And she said, 'Oh, I'd love to eat in one of those funny things.' I was going to say I'd take her, when Van Clark chips in and says, 'Loren Oliver's got the inside track with Mom. He's her star boarder.' Lolita asked a lot of more questions and then made us stop on the road and telephone Oliver to come to the dinner, and he was to sit next to her. Wouldn't that pry you wide open!"

"How did they get on?" I said.

"Talked their fool heads off," Juddy said. "Poor Angel, on her other side, couldn't get in a word edgewise."

I was curious. "What did they find to talk about?"

"Wandos, by cripes!" Angel said.

"And she made a date with him for ten o'clock tomorrow morning—this morning, that is."

That made me uneasy. But there was nothing I could do about it.

Sure enough, a little before eleven Doc's roadster

pulled up at the Feederia and he helped out the gal. She was an eyeful all right: looking fresh as a daisy. I was tidying up my smaller outdoor oven. She came right over to me.

"Hello, Ma," she said.

"Mom," I said.

"Nuts!" she said. "Are you going to disown me? Try and do it."

"Okay, Carnie," I said.

She came over and kissed me. "How's trade, Ma?" she said.

"No complaint," I told her. "Pipe down on the Ma stuff. No need to spread the Baumer genealogy."

She gave me the wide eye. "I'm not ashamed of it," she said. "Loren knows. I've told him."

"*Loren,* huh," I said.

"Sure," she said. "We're pals. He's been telling me all about his Wandos."

"You shouldn't have got me started," Doc said.

"It was you I came over to see, Mom," she said. "But, at that, the Wandos are right up my alley."

"How's that?" I asked her.

"I'm cast for Pocahontas in *The Great John Smith.* Maybe Pocahontas was a Wando."

"Maybe I'm Queen of the May," I said.

"Well, she could be, couldn't she, Loren? Pocahontas, I mean."

He smiled at her like she was a nice, amusing kid out of the nursery.

"I'm afraid not," he said.

"What do I care!" she said. "If I play her for a Wando, who in Hollywood's going to know the difference?"

"Who, indeed!" Doc said. You could see he was getting a lot of fun out of Carnie.

"I like Loren's Wandos," she said. "He's going to lend me some of their gadgets to wear in my hair."

"Gorgets," Doc said.

"Okay, Professor," she said. "Mom, if I had time to work on him, I'll bet I could make him forget he's a professor."

"Help!" Doc said.

"You lay offa him, Carnie," I said. "He's doing all right where he is."

"Sez you!" she said. "Loren, could an Indian princess have red hair? I'm tired of wigs. They make my head itch."

A candid-camera fiend popped out of Cabin No. 6 and asked if she could take Miss Marquesas' picture with us two. It was okay by me. Doc wanted to duck, but Carnie wouldn't let him. She hooked an arm through his and told the amateur to shoot. While that was going on, I'd been figuring that it was up to me to be firm. So I said:

"Listen, Carnie. I'm glad to see you and all that. But after this, you crawl back onto your silver screen and stay there."

"What's the idea, Mom?" she wanted to know.

"Just that we're on different roads."

Doc said, "I don't think that's quite kind or fair, Mom."

"Get this, you two," I said. "I'm Mom Baumer. Carnie's Lolita Marquesas. She can't do me any good and I'd sure be poison for her business. From the time that slick press agent of hers digs up her flossy name and ancestry, I'm out of it. She's the daughter of a thousand Spanish grandees and what does that make me? A cake of Castile soap? Strictly nix. I'm bowing out."

"You're not sore, are you, Ma?" she said.

"Why would I be sore?" I said. "I think you're a swell kid and you're doing a grand job, and the best thing for all concerned is for you to keep right on doing it. I'll always be there in the background, if you need me."

"I know you will, Ma," she said. "You always were." That pretty near weakened me.

"If you'll excuse me," Doc said, "I'll step over and look up the gorgets."

Before he was fairly out of hearing Carnie started in. "Where did you ever get him, Ma? I think he's divine."

"You would," I said, "this season."

She shook her head. "I don't get that," she said.

"You always were one for being in the current," I said. "This is Hollywood's year to go brainy. Doc probably treated you like you were intelligent, because he hasn't got any other approach. So what happens? Right away you begin to figure that you're a submerged intellectual. Look out, gal! That way ruin lies."

Carnie laughed. "The same old Ma! But you've got to admit he's awfully good-looking."

I took a gander over toward the stockade where Doc was coming out of the doorway, and, by thissenthat, Carnie was right. Why I hadn't caught it before I don't know. Maybe because I'd first seen him as the bearded wonder. As he came toward us, with that straight figure and easy swing, his serious face and steady eyes, he was a pretty swell-looking guy of his kind. Inside I was hoping that Carnie would lay off him. I knew he'd been hurt by Juddy and I didn't want him hurt again. And my Carnie was sure something to put a couple of skips in any he-man's heart beat.

Chapter Thirteen

A Little Past History

I was fumigating Cabin Three. Maybe the crawler that I'd seen on the departing tenant's suitcase was only a tick, but it didn't look good to me. You can't afford to take chances in this business. Juddy came over with the morning's mail.

"Open it up for me," I told her. "I've got no secrets in my young life."

When I came out, she was studying over some photos. The candid-camera girl had kept her word and mailed back the prints.

It was a nice job for an amateur. Of course, Carnie had made it easy for her. Trust Lolita Marquesas to make a camera sit up on its hind legs and act nice! Doc turned out to be naturally photogenic, and I showed something in the pose of Honest Old Mom. Juddy picked the best shot and said she was going to frame it.

"Is she really Spanish, do you think, Mom?" she asked me.

"What else would she be with that hair and eyes?"

"She *is* beautiful."

"Sure she is. That's her line of business. Just like

chow is mine."

"So she really came over with Loren Oliver," she said. "I wish I hadn't overslept. He must have been a scream, explaining Wandos to a movie star."

"Maybe it wasn't all Wandos."

"What else would it be?"

"He's a man and she's a gal. It might be a lot of things else."

She gave me the laugh. "Mom, you're hipped on your star boarder."

"Ask him yourself," I said. "He's coming over for his lunch now."

Juddy shook her head. Doc took a gander at the pictures.

"Yes," he said; "that's a good likeness of Miss Marquesas. How charming she is!"

"You gave her a whirl, Doc," I said. "I hope your intentions are honorable."

Good pals as we are, Doc doesn't always keep up with me. He gawped. Then he stiffened up.

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you," he said.

"This hot Spanish blood," I said. "I wouldn't want to have any guest of Tambay get herself into trouble through you."

Juddy giggled. Doc's polite vocabulary slumped. "You're crazy," he said.

"She certainly fell for you," I said. "Didn't I see a

letter in the mail yesterday with an L. M. monogram?"

"For Loren?" Juddy said, staring at him.

"A note," Doc said, "thanking me for the Wando material. Why not?"

"No reason by me," I said. "But why did she ask me when your birthday comes?"

(She hadn't, but what of it? Did I say she had? I was out to produce an effect on Juddy. From the way she eyed Doc like he was somebody she'd never seen up to then, I judged that I'd succeeded.)

"It isn't until spring," he said.

"You're liable to get a solid gold suitcase or something," I told him. "You know how they do those things in Hollywood. You've certainly got something on the ball when it comes to the gals, Doc."

"Don't talk rot, Mom," he said. He was getting annoyed.

I pushed it. "I'm giving you the real McCoy," I said. "You've made a dent like the Grand Canyon. How, I don't know. Maybe you talked to her like she has brains."

"So she has," he said. Juddy almost jumped.

I said, "That's what you made her believe. Naturally she was flattered. You've taken advantage of her youth and innocence—mental, I mean. You've seduced the poor girl's mind, Doc. One of these days, I wouldn't wonder, she'll be giving birth to an idea and you'll be

the father of it."

Juddy snorted, though I couldn't tell whether it was disdain or amusement. There was no doubt about Doc's look. That was one hundred percent pained. He said something about work, and left.

For quite some time my little pal did nothing but think. What her thought produced was this:

"Loren Oliver's all right, of course. But what does *she* see in him?"

"Miaow with whiskers," I said.

"Don't be silly," she said. "It's nothing to me. But I don't understand it. She's so lovely—"

"You're pretty easy to look at yourself, particularly when you're sore," I said.

"I'm *not* sore." That came out good and snappy. "But I don't get it."

"He's male, white, and twenty-one, isn't he?" I said. Maybe I leaned a little on the "male."

She looked up at me, quick, like something had just struck her that she hadn't thought of before.

"I suppose he is, at that," she said.

I pretty near said, "Keep it in mind," but held in. Sometimes Juddy takes it better at an angle than down the alley.

After that, I'd notice her watching him with a puzzled frown. Sometimes, after clean-up, they'd walk around together, taking Dolf along, or without a chap-

eron. But the only crack she made was after dinner one evening when she said, right out of the clear·

"He *has* got a kind of queer charm, Mom. I'll give you that."

Most of her spare time, though, she spent with Angel. She was making him study, too. I asked her if she'd told him about Henderson Kent, and she said not yet, she didn't want to distract his mind until he'd cleaned up on his studies.

He cleaned up all right; passed his Am. Eth. test honestly, this time. All that was now left of the hangover was his thesis on the Wandos. He was doing work on that among the collections, and it was there he struck the evidence he'd hinted at to me when he said he had something on Oliver. He plugged at it till he got it pinned down, then he came hustling over to Tambay, all steamed up.

"I told you Oliver was a rat," he said.

"You've got to show me," I said.

"And me," Juddy said.

"I've got the proof all right. He's been taking gold out of his stockade right along. Your gold, Juddy."

"How do you know?"

"The best job you ever did for yourself was sicking me onto the Wando diggings. Over in the library I got on the trail of a missing report and followed it into the department's private office. Maybe I didn't strickly

have any right there, but I smelt something phony. And did I find it! There, sticking out of the Tambay pigeonhole, was a heavy Manila envelope marked, 'Estimated Value of Gold; Tambay. Private!' Before I could get it open—"

"Before you could what, Angel?" Juddy said.

"Well, why not? It was in your interest, honeybunch. Anyway, old Gracely, head of the Am. Eth. Department, wambled in and grabbed it out of my hand and gave me the bum's rush. So what do you think of that?"

"I think Loren Oliver has some explaining to do," Juddy said.

"I'll say he has! Let's go over there and put the branks on him now."

Juddy thought for a minute. "No, Angel. You keep out of it. I'll handle this. Mom and I."

I hope never to see a colder eye than hers when we stood Oliver up in his enclosure. I wasn't interfering. Let her crack down; she'll have to take it all back. That was my line of thought. Anyway, it was my line of hope. She opened proceedings with a straight left.

"What about the gold you found on my property, Loren?" was what she said, but the general effect was Prisoner - is - there - any - reason - why - you - should - not - be - hanged - by - the - neck - and - may - God - have - mercy - on - your - soul.

Doc's face went deadpan. "I shall have to refer you to President Gilchrist," he said.

"You don't deny it?"

"I shall have to refer you to President Gilchrist."

"I'm asking *you,* Loren Oliver."

You could see the sweat coming out on his forehead and under his eyes, but he only said, "I must still refer you to the President of the University."

"That's the best you can do?" she said.

This time he didn't answer. Just stood there, looking sunk.

"And you had the nerve to try and make me believe that Angel isn't straight."

"I never said he wasn't straight by his own standards. I think he probably is. But his standards might not be yours."

"I'd hate to think they weren't better than yours."

I put in my oar. "This isn't getting anybody anywhere."

"No," he said, "it isn't."

Juddy wasn't through with him, though. I think she was trying to fortify her case for herself. It was hard to look at Doc and believe he was a crook. She said:

"I suppose you'll claim it wasn't for yourself but the University."

"I claim nothing," he said.

"It wouldn't be any use. I've read the lease."

"So have I."

"Then you know that any metals or ores mined at Tambay belong to the estate. Those are the exact words. Aren't they?"

"I believe they are."

"And you've been pretending to be a friend of mine —of ours."

"Pretending?" he said, and I thought I saw her blink. But she went right on.

"I'm going to ask Maurie Sears if we can't have the lease vacated for fraud." Her lips began to tremble. "I don't want to breathe the air till you're off the place forever," she said.

"Do you feel that way, too, Mom?" he asked me.

"No, I don't," I said. "But there ought to be some explanation, Doc."

That stiffened him up again. "I refer you to—"

"Oh, *stop* it!" Juddy said.

By this time the poor guy must have had about all he could take. He turned on her and his manner wasn't much pleasanter than hers.

"If there is nothing further, may I remind you that you are trespassing on University property?"

We got out.

For all Doc's frozen-faced referring, I didn't go to Prexy Gilchrist. After turning it over in my mind, I did go to old Dr. Sheldon in the geology department,

and put it up to him, all but the envelope.

"Gold?" he said. "At Tambay?"

He dragged out a topographic relief map and a lot of blueprints and gave me a free lecture. The nearest gold strike, he said, was sixty miles away in the hills and in an entirely different formation. There simply couldn't be a vein at Tambay, he said; it wasn't that kind of structure, not unless the earth had been throwing a fit and got everything scrambled. "If gold has been found at Tambay," he finished up, "someone has been salting the place. Do you understand what is meant by salting?"

"Since I was ten years old," I said. "Who'd want to salt it?"

"Presumably some person who wished to sell it," he said.

Which made no sense at all. But I felt better about Doc Oliver.

Could I make Juddy see it that way? No, she was through. She wanted no more of Loren Oliver; not even to hear his name. So that was that.

A couple of afternoons later, while I was trying to make a liar out of my bank statement and having no luck at all, a million dollars' worth of rolling stock eased into camp and played sweet music on its horn. I temporarily canned my mathematics and went out. A swell-looking young guy in Fifth Avenue sports clothes

gave me a smile I'd like to have framed for a souvenir and said:

"Paging Mrs. Baumer."

"That's me. Mom for short."

"I've heard about you, Mom."

"Lots of folks have, that I don't even know who or what they are."

"Who or what I am, you might call me an entrepreneur if you know what that means."

"Sure," I said. "A sucker with money."

"Something like that. My money's restless. Wants to get busy and make more; to raise a family, as you might say. I hear you've had a gold strike."

"If you're planning to entrepren Tambay for gold, you're late," I told him.

"The gold's only a sideline with me," he said. "Next week's aviation meet over at Keraw is what brought me down."

"In the air business?" I asked him.

"Well, I've got a few patents," he said. "Also I've backed a Broadway show or two, taken a crack at financing radio, and hit 'em up a couple of times on Wall Street."

"Say, who are you?" I said. "Edsel Ford? Or where did you get all the money in the world?"

"Only part of it," he said. "I got it by getting born into the right family."

"Wouldn't want to sink—invest some capital in a sound, reliable tourist line, would you?" I asked him.

"Not my season for tourists. I'm buying up athletes this winter. Got an option on a pro football franchise. All I need is a team, to make a killing. Do you know a bird at Welliver named Todd?"

"Angel? Do I know my own right leg! Angel's liable to be around this evening."

"Is he? Then why don't I settle in, right here?"

I sang my little song. "You couldn't find a better place for the money in these United States. Electric light and heat. Hot and cold running water. Shower bath. Fresh towels. Palatial furnishings. Auto shed with every cabin. All for two dollars."

"Fair enough. Todd isn't living here, is he? I understood he was still at Welliver."

"So he is. But he comes around. He's sort of interested in my partner."

"Is that so? I had a half interest in her once myself."

"Huh?" I said. "What's that? Say it again."

"I'm Henderson Kent."

"Hend—not the bird Juddy was married to!"

"Sure, she was married to me. And I was married to her. We married each other."

"I get it," I said. "I'm quick that way. The idea is that you were man and wife. Not that it's any of my business, but what did you quit for?"

"I didn't. She did."

"Must have been some reason. Juddy isn't the kind to junk a perfectly good husband without cause."

"Maybe I wasn't so good. Or maybe she lost her taste for me, as you might say. Or maybe she never really had any."

"Then why did she marry you?" I was trying to get an angle on him.

"I was handsome, rich, and popular," he said. "Still am, for that matter."

"You're telling me!"

"I'm going to tell her. Though I don't guess it'll get me anywhere."

"So that's what brought you to Tambay," I said. "Come with me."

Juddy was in a clinch with her first-of-the-month accounts. She looked up from her figures.

"Hello, darling," Henderson Kent said.

"Hendy! How did you get here?"

"You wrote me, didn't you?"

"Yes. Telling you not to come."

"Well, I put the reverse English on it."

"You always did. Now that you're here, what can I do for you?"

"To begin with, you might save me some money."

"That's a new slant for you. How?"

"By inviting me to sleep in your large and moldy

mansion instead of one of Mom's small and lonely cabins," he said.

"Not a hope, Hendy. I'm a respectable divorced lady. Or aren't I? Didn't you get the divorce?"

"Some such process. But you didn't. So I'm not your husband, but you're still my wife. Anyway, if that isn't the status, I can easily get my high-priced lawyer to prove that it ought to be. It's easy to call off a divorce." He looked her over. "And I think I'd like to do it."

"I wouldn't."

"Not sore, are you, sweetie?"

"More at myself than at you. But I'd rather you didn't stay here."

"You can't throw me out. Can she, Mom? This is a public hostelry. I'd yell for the police. How about joining me for dinner?"

"Sorry, I've got a dinner date."

"With Angel Todd?"

Juddy frowned. "How did you know that?"

"Intuition. He can come, too. I'm here to buy Todd. C.O.D., F.O.B., on the hoof."

"Still buying 'em, Hendy?"

"Ouch!" he said.

"Sorry, my dear," Juddy said. "That doesn't come so well from me, does it! If you bought, I sold."

"You can't make me mad," he said. All of a sudden I realized why Juddy had shaken him. Nothing would

ever make him mad. Nothing would ever stir him up. He'd keep his wonderful smile, and shrug things off until a woman would want to kill him. "Oh, well!" he said. "Got a doghouse to rent, Mom?"

"Come along and I'll get you settled," I told him. Angel was liable to be along any minute now and I wanted Juddy to have time to ready up.

Angel spotted the millionaire rolling stock as he turned in at the mansion gate. He said to Juddy:

"Trade must be looking up, honeybunch. Who owns the silk-lined freight car?"

"Brace yourself, Angel," she said. "My late husband." It was no news to Angel that she'd had a husband; she owned up to him after he passed the Am. Eth. exam.

"Here? I'm going over and beat the living hell out of him," he said.

"No, you're not. He isn't after me."

"What is he after, then?"

"You."

"Say that again and say it slow."

"It's you he's hunting. He's building up a pro football organization. He's come to buy you for cash. He told Mom all about it."

"That's different. How's he fixed?"

"All the money in the world. Hold out for your price. He'll pay anything for what he thinks he can't get. I ought to know."

"I'd better have a look at him," Angel said.

As soon as I saw them coming, I went and got Dolf. In case a dogfight started, I wanted to have argument for arbitration handy.

Well, I was never wronger in my life. Those two took to each other from the start.

Hendy Kent fetched out some prime liquor from his car, and we all had a drink. Then the boys had several more rounds by themselves. After that, they were a couple of brothers. Money meant practically nothing. They fixed it up that Angel was to quit college in the spring to help organize the team at a salary of three hundred per month, with a bonus of two hundred for every game they won when the playing season came on. Angel gave Juddy the full heat of his cherub smile.

"I guess that about fixes it for us, honeybunch," he said.

Kent caught it. "This is a holler," he said to me. "Am I paying this bird tops in salary so he can marry my wife?"

Angel was perfectly good-natured about it. "That wife stuff is past history," he said. "This is business."

The drinks were beginning to tell on our swell visitor. "Lemme tell you," he said. "There's just one thing wrong with Juddy."

"Skip it," I said, "you're talking out of turn."

"No, let him," Juddy said. "Shut up, Mom."

"She's too damn serious," Kent said, and for a minute he was serious himself. "You never know how she's going to take things. You might think she's a fluff, because she's so damn pretty. Don't fool yourself. Underneath she's serious; serious as hell. Aren't you serious, Juddy?"

"Sometimes."

"There you are! That's what ditched our marriage."

"You can't scare me," Angel said. "After we're married, we're going to move so fast she won't have time to be serious. That's what she needs. Am I right, sweetie?"

Juddy didn't say a word. She had been looking from one to the other of the two lads, with an expression that didn't seem to me to quite fit the occasion. If I had been Angel, I wouldn't have liked it. He didn't even notice. He turned to me:

"Am I right, Mom?"

I ducked. "Life is real, life is earnest," I said. "If you don't believe me and Henry W., try running a camp on a shoestring."

"Give that old gravedigger another drink," Kent said. "Then let's all have dinner on me right here and now."

So I cooked up a special and they ate it. Kent was to drive over to Welliver in the morning so he and Angel could sound out Ramsdell and a couple of other good men on the team.

Juddy sent Angel home early. She sat around for

awhile, sort of lifeless and dispirited, until I told her she'd better go to bed. She did, but her light was still on at midnight.

Chapter Fourteen
The Question of Gold

Maurie Sears got out the injunction. Doc packed his suitcases. There was a gleam in Juddy's eyes as she watched him drive off.

"My theory is that Tambay's through with that bird, Mom," she said.

My theory was that maybe she'd have to theorize again. One punch never would lick Loren Oliver. Not if I knew him.

Who should hit the Feederia for lunch, but our old friend Sheriff Mowry. It was time for the entente cordiale.

"Let's level, Sheriff," I said. "What's about this bridge?"

"It'll take influence to stop it, ma'am," he said.

"Suppose it does go through. What does that get you?"

"I'm in the contracting business. We'll handle the dirt," He gave me a wink.

"I guess the other way is easier for all parties," I said. "Twenty-five percent?"

"Twenty-five percent," he said, "and right reason-

able."

Seeing he had us by the slack, I thought so myself. But Juddy was something else again. She was feeling pretty cocky over booting Doc out. Let 'em all come, she'd take 'em on, one down, another up. Three-four evenings we spent in footless arguments, and then passing the stockade one morning, she heard something that took some of the starch out of her jumper. It was the old, familiar clatter of the shovel in the dirt.

"What's that?" she said, goggling.

"That," I said, "is Prof Loren Oliver of the Department of Amerind Ethnology, Welliver University, digging a couple of Wandos for dinner. And remember nice girls don't cuss."

"He can't," she said. "I can have him arrested. We've got a court order."

"He's got a newer and better one. So what do you do about that?—Don't you growl at me, Jane Ann Judson."

She was making noises in her throat, like a kitten does when it's mad. Juddy can be a brat at times.

Next morning was one of those days that starts wrong and gets worse. A lady in a trailer got premature with a baby, and I had to help her scared husband pack for the hospital at 6:15, with our truckies yelling for their grub. A couple in Cabin Five planned to cut down their night's overhead by swiping a pair of sheets, and threat-

ened me with the law when I made 'em open up their suitcase. Dolf got hungry and pinched a couple of flapjacks so hot they burnt his mouth, and waved his tail at me when I jumped him. And there was a love letter from the bank, reminding us of a note and mortgage due in a month, and wasn't it about time we paid it off—a little matter of $4,076.60 with interest. Like it paid off, would they? So would I. Fat chance. On top of all that, it was raining and I was cross as hell.

Doc was eating his breakfast in the corner when Juddy pushed open the door. He got up. She looked at him without seeing him, and he made a quick change from red to kind of white. Juddy said:

"Mom, what's the matter with that trailer under the Pride of India tree?"

"Broke," I said. "On their uppers."

It was one of those things that happen in every camp. I'd got their story the night before, from the wife. She was a young, pretty thing, thin as a stick of spaghetti and worn to a frazzle tending her half-sick husband who shaped up like a t.b. to me. They'd got this far on their way from Oklahoma to her brother in Florida, who might have a job for the husband, and I don't reckon they could have raised the change for a dollar between them. You could see they were scared.

"I thought I heard the girl crying," Juddy said.

"That was me when they hung me up for the park-

ing fee," I said.

"The man got a fill of gas."

"Also on tick. Every camp gets gas grafters. It's part of the overhead."

"Do you suppose they've got anything to *eat?*"

That cracked me. I knew what she meant. "Who's going to pay for it?" I said. "Do you think this camp is endowed?"

Doc Oliver got up. As he passed us, Juddy drew her skirts aside and leaned away, registering that if he didn't have leprosy, it was at least seven-year itch. From the window I could see him bracing the trailer girl, who was taking in some of the raggedy things she'd hung out to air. She lifted her head and spoke, and he walked away, blinking like somebody had hung one on his chin. I stepped to the door.

"What are you up to now, Doc?"

He turned the eye of a sick fish on me. "Mom, what's wrong with me?"

"I haven't got time to go into it now," I said.

"I never can seem to do anything right," he said. "Not with women."

"Well, tell Mom."

"I tried to give that girl a little money."

"How much?"

"Twenty dollars."

"What did you say to her?"

"What was there to say?"

"I see. You wait till her husband isn't around and just go up and push a twenty on her. That's fine. That's swell. Doc, Doc, haven't you got any notion of what a good-looking woman is up against on the road?"

His eyes looked at me, kind of dazed. "No," he said. "Have you?"

Inside the wagon Juddy cackled right out loud. "Tact!" she said.

"Never mind, Doc," I said, for he was looking unhappy and rattled. "You mean well."

"I did," he said. He was still trying to figure out the trailer girl. "What made her act that way?"

"Hellfire and campfire, Doc! Where's your savvy? She thought you were making a pass at her."

Juddy giggled again. Doc sort of gulped.

"For *money?*" He took the bill out of his pocket and stared at it like it was poison.

"Gimme that twenty," I said.

It didn't require two minutes of my valuable time to negotiate and report. "It's okay, Doc. She's crying. I guess they're both crying. You get that way when you haven't eaten properly for maybe a week. Doc, you must be rich."

"No," he said. "Not rich."

"Speaking as man to man, about what would you assay?"

"Mom!" Juddy said.

"You let me run this," I said. "Doc, the bank down at Leverton is getting itchy about—"

Juddy grabbed me. "No, Mom! No! No!" She almost bit my ear.

"Well, pardon me," I said. "I'm speaking out of turn again. But maybe you'll tell me how we're to pull Tambay through this knothole any other way."

She put her teeth over her lip. "I'd rather take Hendy's money than his."

Doc walked out. I was sore. I gave it to Juddy straight.

"You needn't be so snotty about his money. You've had seven hundred of it."

"Seven hundred!" she said. "What seven hundred?"

"Use your intelligence."

"The bet!"

"That's it."

"Was that Loren Oliver's money? How rotten! I've been trying not to suspect about Angel. He must have spent the money—"

"Lost it."

"—while he was on that drunk, and then have gone to Loren Oliver."

"To me. I'm the one that got it from Doc."

"Did Angel know where it came from?"

"Yes."

She didn't say anything more; just sat there, think-

ing. After a while I said:

"Was that on the up-and-up about going to your husb—to Hendy Kent for the money?"

The color all went out of her face. "You know what it would mean."

"You'd have to take him back. Or would you?"

"I wouldn't be such a rotten sport as to take his money and not make good."

"No, I reckon not."

"Oh, Mom! I don't know what to do. Why, even Loren Oliver would laugh at me if I went back to Hendy. Did you see his face when I suggested it?"

"I did. He didn't look to me like he was laughing. Now, I want to ask you something. Do you still think Oliver shapes up like a crook, after seeing what he did about the trailer couple?"

"Oh, that's no argument," she said. "Lots of crooks are generous. They can afford to be. Why, Mom, President Gilchrist has practically admitted that they struck gold at Tambay."

It was true, too. A reporter had got to him, and the old boy said that all would be explained in his report to the trustees. Which didn't look too good for Doc. Just the same I didn't believe it of him.

"Look, Juddy," I said. "I've got a hunch. You won't let me borrow the money from Doc. Okay. How about getting it on a business deal?"

"What kind of a deal?"

"Straight business. If Mowry—I mean the bank—forecloses on Tambay, what becomes of Doc's Wandos?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"I'll tell you. As soon as the Welliver lease is up, he loses them."

"What of it?"

"God give me patience! I'm banking on the hope that Doc will make us a loan on those dead Injuns."

"You mean on the gold."

"Have it your own way. The point is, will you give him a lease as security for the loan if I get it?"

"Oh, I suppose so! But you'll have to do it all. I don't want to have anything to do with it or him."

Doc was in his cabin, working on his papers. I put the proposition up to him.

"How much do you need?" he said.

"Four grand. Have you got it?"

"I can get it."

"Are the Wandos worth that much to you?"

At the time, I didn't notice that what he said was no answer. "Perhaps the best way would be for me to take up the note when it falls due," he said.

"Doc, you're a swell guy," I said. "I guess this'll put a tuck in Mr. Sheriff Mowry's shirttail. By the way, he might try to make you some kind of trouble. He's got the gold fever bad."

I told him about the bridge project. He listened and thought it over.

"Suppose you let me worry about our friend, Mowry," he said.

"Well, I thought you ought to know," I said. "How about that gold, anyway, Doc? Aren't you going to tell Mom?"

"I can't, Mom."

"Okay. Suppose I find out for myself." He looked at me with his eyebrows up. "Something tells me that if Angel Todd could dig a clue out of those reports, I can. Old Sleuth Baumer. Any objections?"

"No."

It wouldn't have made any difference if he'd said yes. Come hell or highwater, I was going to have a crack at it.

The aviation meet over at Keraw started. I got a long-distance from Hendy Kent to pass on to Juddy. He was flying his new-type machine, bringing Angel, and he wanted a landing space kept clear for him. Not much space needed, for he claimed his bug could light on a postage stamp and take off up a chimney.

"An airplane here?" Juddy said. "What about Old Swoby?"

"He'll be scared witless," I said. "Put him in the cellar of Tambay Mansion."

As usual, Old Swoby was fishing in his funny jacket

and little red cap. I explained to him about the meet; that the sky would be full of planes, but they weren't after him and he'd be perfectly safe in the cellar. I never know how much of what you tell him the old boy takes in, but he'd heard a couple of air-speeders already and he was perfectly satisfied to dig in.

Pretty soon Hendy's fancy contraption fluttered down like a leaf into our parking lot, and out slipped Angel, looking for Juddy.

"Come on up with us, honeybug," he said. "She'll hold three easy."

"I don't believe I will, Angel," she said. "I've got some work to do here."

Hendy Kent stuck his head out and touched his cap to me. "Taxi, ma'am?" he said.

"Right-o!" I said. Angel boosted me in.

"Where to?"

"Welliver Library. You can come back for me in two hours."

"Thank you, lady," he said. We went straight up like smoke through a flue, and streaked for Welliver like a bat out of hell.

Of course there was no use my trying for the private envelope that Angel had traced; they'd have that in a locked safe by now. My best chance was to smell around after the same clue that had started him. I asked a skinny party with spectacles to let me see the Tambay

documents, and he brought me out some moldy-looking sheets written on by somebody that hadn't been to spelling school lately. It was tough going, but I hadn't been at it an hour when the truth hit me spang in the eye. This was the paragraph.

The cheef who was also a valliant player at the chung-ke stones wore a chaine of shell gorgets with sundry garnishments of soft gold fashioned into small imagys. These we were advertised were the fruyt of forays upon a tribe of lesser sauvages whose stony hills distant from Wando territorry held veines of the precious metall.

I must have raised a war whoop, for a couple of attendants came up and worried about me. It was all plain enough now. The geology bird was right; there was no vein of gold at Tambay and never had been, except what the scrappy old Wandos had grabbed off from the interior tribes. Being relics, these belonged to the University and not to Tambay. So Doc Oliver was in the clear. If that old crow of a Prexy hadn't had a hunch to play secrecy, there'd never have been any mix-up.

Was I going to give Juddy an earful!

Chapter Fifteen
The Angry Mob

It was a good three hours before the boys came back for me.

"There's hell to pay," Angel said. "Murder over at Bannerhill Plantation."

"Who?" I said.

"Superintendent's wife and daughter."

"Have they got the man?"

"Not yet. Some say he's a nigger. Others took him for some sort of foreigner."

They dropped me at Tambay and took off again. Juddy wasn't there, but I found the two Gullah girls in the attic and got the bad news from them. They were so paralyzed with scare, they could hardly make sense; the darkies got that way after a killing. But I got it out of them that Old Swoby was suspected.

"Old Swoby!" I said. "Why he's in the cellar."

"No'm, he's gone," Ollie said, and set to rocking her head between her hands.

"Where?"

"I ast my God!" Nollie said, and began to pray.

Juddy came in at dusk. A flight of planes had scared

poor Swoby so that he crawled out the cellar window and broke for the woods. That was bad stuff. If they ever caught him, God help him! To a mob, a foreigner is always guilty. Juddy had hoped to pick him up and get him away in her car. When I saw how jittery she was, I decided that my news about the gold gorgets could wait.

Hendy Kent's plane fluttered in and he and Angel hopped out and came to the mansion.

"Never had so much fun in my life," he said. "Talk about following the hounds! A manhunt's got it beaten a million."

"Can this bird drive a windmill!" Angel patted his new friend on the shoulder. "I thought we had him that last swoop."

"What's all this?" I said. "It's my opinion you lads have been collecting a snootful."

"Just a couple of snorts. We've been hedge-hopping after the murderer."

"How do you know he was the murderer?"

"He was running away, wasn't he?"

"There's logic for you!" I said to Juddy.

"Last we saw of him, he ducked into the woods beyond the marsh," Angel said. "I got a couple of cracks at him with Hendy's gun, but I must have missed. That tree of yours is liable to get a load before morning, if they catch him."

"I've never been in on a lynching," Hendy said. "I'd hate to miss anything good. Think they'll pull it here?"

"And I married you!" Juddy said.

The way she said it got to him. He sort of blinked. "Oh, well!" he said. "If you feel that way about it we'll pick up some cigarettes and be on our way."

While I was waiting on them, Juddy slipped across to the plane and pinched the revolver. She wasn't for letting Angel shoot some poor slob that might be perfectly innocent. They put off without noticing their loss.

They hadn't been gone half an hour when Doc showed up at the Feederia. He was in his working clothes, and he looked white and grave.

"Where are all the campers?" he asked me.

"Taken their cars and gone out to see the show," I said.

"Old Swoby is back," he said. "I've got him in the shelter."

"Then everything's jake," I said.

"No. He's been shot."

"Shot?" Juddy forgot her feud with Doc. "What—why—"

"It isn't serious. Flesh wound. I've dressed his arm."

"Doc! He didn't do it," I said. "He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"You don't need to tell me that."

"What have they got on him?"

"He was found hiding in a barn near the place."

"Hiding from the airplanes."

"Of course. But could you get a mob to believe that? There's something else. The woman, before she died, muttered something about a man with a red head. Swoby had that infernal red cap of his on. When they found him, he ran."

"They'll follow him here."

"I'm afraid so."

"What'll we do, Doc?"

"I've telephoned the State Police."

"Did you get 'em?"

"No, they're all out on the hunt. I left word."

I hustled across to the Feederia and brought back my good old forty-five.

"Look," I said. "Give this to Old Swoby and head him for the Big Swamp. They won't find him there. Not tonight. Christ! What's that?" I ought to have known, though. I'd heard that lost-soul wailing before.

"Bloodhounds," he said. "The swamp is hopeless." He turned to Juddy. "Is there a bar to the door of the log shed in your back yard?"

"Yes."

"My God, Doc!" I said. "Are you crazy? You can't stand 'em off there."

"Have you got any better plan?"

"No, but—"

"You don't expect me to give Swoby up, surely."

"I'd rather have him killed than you."

"We're wasting time," he said.

Juddy spoke up, kind of desperate. "Yes, we're wasting time. Don't you see you can't do anything with him?"

She didn't look at Doc. I think she was afraid to.

Doc put his head inside. "Come, Swoby," he called.

Swoby came out. He stared from one to the other of us and then said something that made me almost cry. "Why must they kill me?" he said. "This is not my country."

"You must do what Mr. Oliver tells you," Juddy said to him.

Something shoved against my leg. It was Dolf.

"Okay, boy," I said. "Trail along. You like trouble."

We all went across the road to make ready. Doc sized up the log cabin and the lay of the land around it. He had his pistol. I had my old forty-five whanger. Juddy's twelve-gauge stood in the hall corner. I sneaked it and a box of shells and gave the lot to Old Swoby, who'd been in the war and knew a gun when he saw it. Juddy had hung on to the gat she swiped from Hendy's plane.

"They might try to burn us out," Doc said. "We'd better roll that rain barrel in. We'll need buckets." That guy thought of everything.

While Juddy and I were getting out the buckets, the

sound of the dogs got nearer and more mournful. They were baying at the ford where Old Swoby waded the stream. That didn't give us too much time. Doc spoke up, quiet and businesslike.

"This is the plan. When they come, I shall try to get a hearing. I don't want to hurt anyone. But I do want them to believe that we're prepared to shoot if necessary."

"Well, you know how," I said.

"Thanks to you, Mom," he said. "Now you two go back to the mansion and keep after the troopers."

"And leave you here?" Juddy said.

"This is no time to argue," he said. "Go back."

Juddy didn't argue. She just walked into the shack. I trailed. Dolf followed me. Old Swoby was already there.

"For God's sake, Juddy!" Doc said, kind of pleading.

Her voice shook, too, when she spoke. "I'm not afraid. At least, not very."

"Mom!" he said. "Mom! Get her out."

"Don't start anything, Doc," I warned him. "I was base of a living pyramid once. You can't shove me around. And I won't let you shove Juddy. We're staying."

"They come now," Old Swoby said.

The hounds were yelling for blood; the mob, too. The front line of the chase straggled into the yard. Doc

pushed the big door shut and slipped the bar. Old Swoby took his place at the rear window with Juddy's gun. It all looked to me like bad trouble. Well, Doc was in charge. He stood by the small front window next the door.

"Everybody quiet, please," he said. "I'll do the talking."

He stuck his pistol through the window and fired a shot in the air. A car swung into the grounds. By its lights I could see the advance guard taking cover in the thickets. Bixie Groff and a bunch of his townies were behind one clump.

"Don't come any farther," Doc said. You'd have thought he was in his classroom. Quiet authority; that was his pitch. Some bird behind a live oak called out:

"Give the fella up, Prof. We got nothing against you."

"If you don't, we'll come and fetch him."

"And anybody interferes, they're right liable to get hurted."

Groff, with a couple of his pals, was edging over to the left.

"Watch yourself, Doc," I said. "They're fanning out."

A bullet plunked into the log above my head. Some more followed. They were firing high. Trying to get our goat. The car lights were switched off now, but there was enough moon so we could see a man moving

forward alone.

"Stop that shooting," he said.

"Maurie Sears," Juddy said.

"Quiet!" Doc snapped at her.

"Oliver!" Maurie called.

"Yes?"

"Can I have a word with you?"

"Certainly."

He walked up to the door. Through my chink between the logs, I could see his face, stern and set.

"You might as well give him up, Oliver."

"So that you and your friends can lynch him?"

"I'll never have a hand in another lynching. Not at Tambay." (Well, I knew why that was.)

"He isn't the man, Sears."

"Let the law decide that."

Doc said, "The law? Will you guarantee to deliver him safely in jail?"

"I can't guarantee anything. But I'll do my best."

"I believe that, Sears. But I don't believe it would be good enough."

Somebody back in the bushes yelled, "Cut the cackle and let's get 'em."

"There isn't much time," Maurie Sears said. "As your friend, Oliver, I beg you to turn the man over to me."

Doc seemed to be thinking about it, for he didn't say anything for a few seconds. Then:

"That's your best advice?"

"It is."

"Would you do it in my place?"

"The case is differ—"

"Would you do it in my place, Sears?"

"No."

"I thought not. But you expect me to?"

"No."

"Thank you, Sears. Neither will I."

It was then that Juddy laughed out loud. It was a queer spot for a laugh. Or was it? On second thought it wasn't so queer. There was something sort of triumphant about that laugh. I knew what it meant, and I could have laughed, too. Or cried just as easy.

Maurie Sears went crazy. "Good God! Juddy!" he yelled. His voice dropped to a snarl. "You dirty coward! You've got her there to save your hide." The mob heard it and there was another howl.

"That's a lie, Maurie Sears," I said. "He's got us here because he damn well can't help himself."

"Mom, too," he sort of gasped. But his thought was all for my pal. "You can't stay there," he said, like a man praying. "You can't, my sweet. Oliver, if you're a man you'll give her to me."

Juddy said, "He can't. I won't go."

Maurie whirled around to face the mob. It was inching forward.

"Men, there are two ladies in here."

The answer came back quick enough.

"Let 'em get out." ... "Nobody wants to harm the gals." ... "If they stick around they're right liable to see things they won't like."

Doc's voice snapped. "Keep back, there. No farther!"

"You can't hold them," Maurie warned him.

I said in Doc's ear, "Ask 'em for ten minutes to confer on it."

He passed it to Maurie, and Maurie put it to the crowd and reported back that they'd stand for five minutes; no more. I knew how they'd use the five minutes. Back in the darkness a voice was shouting:

"Where's those fatwood torches?"

I touched Old Swoby on the shoulder. "Take your coat and pants off," I told him.

"Me? What for?"

"Don't talk. Hurry, if you want to save your neck."

I shucked my clothes and got him into them. There was some hay in the corner, to fill out the proper curves. Lucky I had on the old floppy bonnet I usually wore around the camp. That would pretty well hide his face. I made him walk across the floor a couple of times to get the right gait. Then I called Dolf. He figured to be the best part of the disguise: being a famous figure in the locality, and everybody knowing he was my watchdog. While I was walking Swoby, I outlined what he

had to do and prayed God he could do it.

"It's simple," I said. "The only question is whether you've got the guts to carry it through."

"If I go," he said, "that makes safety for all here?"

"Well, it might," I said. "I hope."

"Then I go," he said. "I'm afraid; yes. But I go."

"Atta boy!" I patted his shoulder. "Wait till I speak my lines, then walk out there like you was in a hurry but not too much of a hurry. Give 'em a hand wave—like this—and beat it for the woods."

I opened the door and stuck out my head with the bonnet on it. The crowd gave me a hand.

"It's Mom Baumer! In person."..."Howdy, Mom."..."Make mine a pork barbecue with cawfee."..."Come and join us, old gal. There's goin' to be doin's."

I flapped my hand for silence. "Say, you fellas."

"Say it, Mom."

"I suppose you birds are thinking it's you that are getting me out of here. You couldn't get me out with a cable; I'd see you in hell first. But—well—you all know my little dog." I gave a yank on the leash and Dolf stuck his nose out. "My little dog's got a date with a tree. So I reckon I'd better take him out, as he's in a hurry. Okay by you?"

"Sure, Mom!" By the laugh I got I knew it was going all right.

"You get your big dogs out of the way." Those

bloodhounds didn't fit into my plan at all. "My little dog don't like big dogs."

That struck them as good sense. They shut the hounds in the woodshed. We were all set.

I ducked back, handed the leash to Old Swoby, jammed the bonnet down over his ears, and gave him a shove. I figured that nobody in that bunch was going to interfere with a skunk who was in a hurry. I was right too. Nobody came near.

Old Swoby was good. He waved his hand like I told him, and scuttled for the nearest thicket. As he left, the crowd heard the voice under the bonnet say:

"Thanks, gents. Back in five minutes."

That's what they thought they heard. Juddy and Doc nearly threw a fit. I never told 'em that I'd done a vaudeville turn as a ventriloquist when I was on the stage. As soon as they recovered, Doc said:

"If we can hold them ten minutes, that should give him a fair start."

It looked like everything was going to be okay. Old Swoby would have time to reach the woods. The bloodhounds wouldn't be after him this time. What about the rest of us, though? I wasn't too easy in the old mind when I tried to figure what would happen when they found the game had slipped them.

You can't pretty much tell about a lynching mob. Folks think that lynchers are out for vengeance, rough

justice, that sort of thing. That's baloney. They're out for sport. It's the thrill of the manhunt; the kick they get out of the kill. This bunch were going to be plenty sore when they found out how we'd fooled 'em. Likely as not there'd be some fairly rough stuff at first, but I didn't reckon it would be any worse than a little handling.

Probably that was the way it would have worked out, if something hadn't happened that put them on the blood trail again.

The moon backed into a cloud. I got the impression of a lot of movement going on outside. The firing started up again. I let off the old pump gun out the back window, by the way of warning. From what I could make out, Maurie Sears was doing his best to hold them. He called:

"Mom! Juddy! Are you coming out?"

Juddy didn't answer. Fat chance for me to come out in Old Swoby's pants. I'd have been ashamed. They didn't meet the requirements of my architecture by inches. Maurie was hurrying up and down, now, trying to be everywhere at once. They were scattering shots again. I couldn't see him now. Somebody yelled:

"My God! They've got Sears."

"Who did it?"

"One of those bastards in there."

The low mutter went through the crowd and got

deeper and savager, like nothing human. It went down my spine like dripping ice. I knew it was life-and-death now for Doc anyway, if they thought he fired the shot. So did he know, I guess.

A bunch of them came out of cover and carried something toward the house. Doc opened the door enough for a look-see. Nobody was coming our way. Doc said:

"Juddy!"

She went over to him.

"This may seem a queer time to say it. But I don't want you to think that I cheated you."

She put out her hands to him. "Oh, Loren!" she said.

He held out his arms. She came into them as if she belonged there. But it wasn't what she expected.

He swung her out through the door and barred it behind her. Then he leaned out the window, and let his voice loose.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot! It's a woman."

She turned and beat at the heavy logs like a crazy thing until some young chaps ran up and dragged her away. She fought every step. They looked to me like Welliver boys. Okay. We'd have some friends in the crowd when it came to a showdown.

"That's better," Doc said.

"I don't know, Doc," I said to him. "Maybe you ought to have let her stay."

"I'd do the same to you if I were big enough," he said.

"Well, you ain't," I told him. "Besides, when they see me they'll know Old Swoby's loose and get after him. I'll guard the back window."

Everything was so quiet outside we could hear them calling from bush to bush.

"Is he dead?"

"As good as. They got him through the lungs."

"I'd hate to be the guy that did it."

"That son-of-a-bitch, Oliver, done it. I seen him draw a bead through the window." That was Bixie Groff.

"Get the fatwood. We'll burn him out and string him up."

Somewhere back a small brush fire was lighting up. Figures gathered around it.

"Come on, fellas." That was Bixie again. "What the hell we doodlin' around for! Let's get him."

"Shoot that bastard, Doc," I said.

"I'm holding my shots," he said. He kind of laughed. "Come over here and give me a kiss, Mom, and get to hell out of here. You're no use to me now." What I answered him didn't take much time. "Don't be vulgar, Mom," he said and laughed again.

The torches began coming then, curving through the air and landing on all sides, but most of them short.

One rolled under my window and I doused it with a pail of water. Another one, near the corner, I couldn't reach. Smoke began to come up.

Those brave, bloodthirsty lynchers weren't taking any chances with their precious hides. They were 'possum hunters; burn 'em out and pop 'em down. Well, that's where they were just a leetle too smart. The smoke was thickening when I heard the prettiest music that ever blessed my old ears. It was the police siren. Two cars came in on the high jump and four husky young cops tumbled out.

The lieutenant in charge came over to the shack and hammered on the door with the butt of his revolver.

"Mr. Oliver."

"Stand away," Doc said.

"State Police. You're under arrest."

"Can you protect us?"

"Yes, sir. Come out, both of you."

"Swoby isn't here. There's no one but Mrs. Baumer and me."

He stepped out. What happened next, I don't rightly know. There was a rush and some police shots, fired into the ground, and free-for-all fighting between the Wellivers and the mob, with the footballers chucking rules into the discard and doing nicely. One of the police cars unraveled itself and put off with Doc between the Loot and another cop. The two that were left

hustled me over to the mansion. One of them, a nice young fella with a Fuller Brush pompadour asked me:

"Where's the man you were protecting, ma'am?"

"He got away. In my clothes."

"That's good," he said. "He didn't do it. We got the man that did, a red-headed hobo, about half-witted. He's confessed."

"Where are they taking Doc Oliver?"

"To Brandon jail."

"Will he be safe there?"

He shrugged. "That's up to the sheriff, ma'am."

Juddy came up and hugged me. "Oh, Mom!" she said.

"What about Maurie?"

"Dr. Starrow's taken him to the Leverton Hospital."

"Is it bad?"

"I'm afraid so. We're waiting to hear."

"Where's Angel? I didn't see him in the come-all-ye."

She turned to Rags and Tatters Owen, who had been in the thick of it and needed repairs. "Well, where is Angel?"

That vaudeville team put on their best duet style. "I don't know," they both said together, and then, each to the other, "Well, where *is* he?"

"You needn't answer," Juddy said. "I know. He's drunk. He would be when I needed him. Hendy, too, I suppose."

"Not me." Hendy Kent poked his head in at the door-

way. It was wrapped in a dirty, white bandage. "Somebody sideswiped me with a tire wrench," he said.

You never can tell about folks. That's what makes life so interesting. I'd have bet that pampered son of the rich would run a mile to sidestep a fight. Juddy said:

"Come here and let me fix it."

It gave her something to do while we were waiting. At two o'clock we had word from the hospital. Maurie was unconscious. Every hour we telephoned. No change. Tambay didn't get much sleep that night. To pass the time, I told Juddy about the old Tambay document I'd found, and the gold ornaments. She wasn't even interested.

"I don't need any proofs that I've been a fool about Loren," she said.

"What price Angel now?" I said.

"Poor Angel!" she said.

"That's all right," I said, "so long as you don't get too sympathetic and mix everything up for yourself."

"Mom," she said, "does Hendy remind you of anyone?"

"Me?" I said. "No, what's the catch? Why should he?"

"Think again."

Then all of a sudden it hit me. "Well, by thissenthat, it's Angel! Hendy's a pocket edition of him. They even look alike. Why, they even think alike!"

"Now do you get it, about Angel and me?"

"I do not. Once bit, twice shy, I'd have thought."

"Mom, you're dumb."

"Okay, I'm dumb. But I wouldn't be dumb enough, after I'd married one of a kind and found it was a flop, to take on another just like him."

"That's the point. Angel was never my danger."

"No? What was?"

"Hendy, of course. I thought you understood that before."

"You told me you were cured of him."

"Hendy himself was no temptation. The temptation was his money. You know the homeopathic principle, like cures like. Angel was a counterirritant, or whatever they call it. The more I saw of him, the better I realized what a boob I'd be to go back to Hendy."

I gawped at her. "But unless you're stuck on Angel—"

"I'm not. I never was; not really. But I'm sorry for him."

"So am I. I think you gave him a dirty deal, Juddy."

"No, it was all fair enough. He tried to make me. That was all right; part of the game he played. When he couldn't get me any other way, he wanted to marry me. I never pretended, with him. He just took everything for granted."

"You stuck up for him against Loren Oliver."

"My theory was that Loren was being unnecessarily

tough with Angel, and I wasn't going to stand by and see him put it over."

"I get it. The gal bought a dog. Anyone that won't protect her own property is no true woman, huh?"

Juddy grinned. "Something like that," she said.

Two washed-out females wobbled over to the Feederia for breakfast. Crossing the road I caught sight of something at the lower turn that jarred a gasp out of me. Juddy saw it, too; a figure swinging from Tambay tree. Old Swoby! I thought. Before I could stop her, Juddy was off, running like a deer. When I caught up, she was leaning against the fence, panting and gulping with laughter that was kind of sick.

"It's a dummy," she said.

The thing swung around in the wind. A placard was pinned to its front. It was lettered in big, ugly print:

OLIVER YOUR NEXT

Chapter Sixteen

A Girl's Reputation

Was I glad to see old Swoby and Dolf when they showed up at about ten o'clock! They were caked with mud, and all in from their push through the swamps. When Swoby heard about Doc Oliver he went haywire. He was all for taking Juddy's gun and staging a one-man jail break. I had to threaten to lock him into the stockade.

Dr. Starrow stopped in on his way to Brandon. Maurie was about the same. He had an outside chance.

"We may have to operate," he said.

"Will you telephone us?" Juddy said.

"If it's successful."

"And if it isn't?" I said.

"We'll hold back the news as long as we can. To save Oliver. They're organizing to break into the jail and get him if Maurie dies."

"Can't the sheriff stop them?"

He clucked. "He's up for election next year," he said.

Over in the camp, Hendy Kent was puttering around his helicopter, readying it up to leave.

"I wish you'd stick around till tomorrow, Hendy," I

told him. "I might have use for you."

Somehow or other Doc Oliver had to get out of that jail if things went wrong at the hospital. That's when I figured Hendy's machine would come in handy.

"Right-o, Mom," he said. "Yours to command."

All the morning we waited for news. All we got was rumors. By afternoon I couldn't stand it any longer. I hopped in the car, saying nothing to Juddy, and beat it for Brandon. The sheriff was at the jail.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Baumer?" he said, very polite and official.

"Howdy, Sheriff," I said. "I dropped in to talk over the situation."

"What situation? I don't know of any situation."

"You ought to get around more, Sheriff," I said. "Don't you know they're all set to lynch Loren Oliver?"

"That's all talk. Brandon's a law-abiding community."

"And the Hanging Tree bears crab apples, I reckon."

"Sears ain't dead."

"No. But he's liable to die tonight or sooner."

"I can't help that," he said. "You'll have to excuse me now. I've got an emergency call out in the country. Official business."

I could have kicked his pants, he looked so stuffy and important.

"So's to leave the coast clear for the lynchers," I said.

"If you can't hold the jail, why don't you send for the troopers?"

"Am I crazy!" he said. "They already shot the toes off three-four of our folks last night. Those fellas got no moderation. Listen, ma'am, it's like this. If the crowd comes here after Oliver, there'll be a lot of our best people among 'em. S'pose some of them gets killed. Where does that leave me?"

"Listen, yourself, Mowry," I said. "We've got to get Oliver out of there. If you'll manage it, Juddy'll cut you in for your twenty-five percent on the gold proposition."

He favored me with that pig's-eye squint of his. "What guarantee have I got of that?"

"I'll guarantee it." (Why wouldn't I!)

"You ain't the owner of Tambay," he said. "What about her?'

"Juddy'd give up every cent in the world to save Loren Oliver," I said.

At the moment I didn't think Mowry might take that for more than was meant. He walked over and stuck his face close to mine. You could see the meanness and dirty suspicion coming out on him like sweat.

"Yeh," he said, "I been hearin' things. What's Oliver to her?"

Well, that was simply handing it to me on a platter. I went to it; gave Mowry the good old mellerdrammer

with all stops out. I dropped to a whisper.

"Can I trust you, Sheriff?" I said. "As one of the family?"

He swelled up like a puff-adder. "Straight talk, ma'am," he said.

"Three months gone," I said. "Is that straight enough for you?" I've had good practice in my day, but I never told one with a stiffer lip.

I could see his mind working. A percentage on Tambay gold and a hold over Juddy to make her come through. A profitable deal, and Mowry as the savior of the Maurie name. How could that combination fail to ring the bell!

"Will he marry her?" he said.

"How can he marry her if they lynch him?"

"A Maurie of Tambay!" he said. "The dirty, seducin' Yank!"

I had him going! I let out another loop. "Sheriff, who'll look after her and her fatherless child?" By this time I was so good that I pretty near made myself cry.

"I'm askin' you," he said. "Will he marry her?"

Right there is where I played cagy. "That's up to you," I told him.

"He'd better, by God!" he said. "I'll see he does, or I'll shoot him like a dog."

"That's talking!" I said. "But you've got to save him first."

He did some hard, sour thinking. "Mobs here don't move till midnight. I can't hold 'em off. Not without makin' a hell of a lot of trouble for myself. But I might sneak him out. Can you get him out of the state if he's delivered at Tambay?"

"Yes. We've got an airplane."

He reached his decision. "The jail laundry goes out tonight. Watch for the wagon."

"Attaboy, Sheriff! Once a Maurie, always a Maurie." I thought a little soft soap wouldn't hurt. "The old blood'll tell."

"Have the airplane ready. Sears is very low. I just had the word. Be at Tambay gate at nine o'clock."

"Don't I get to see Doc Oliver, Sheriff?"

At first he was for turning me down. Then he said. "You can come along with me for a witness. I'll put him on record. You don't have to say anything."

He took me out through the yard. They had Doc in a small flimsy annex. I got the idea. The mob could get him without damaging the jail.

Doc was white, but just as cool as ever. He listened carefully, while the sheriff outlined the plan.

"Why should I run away?" he said. "I didn't shoot poor Sears."

"They'll string you up, just the same," I said.

"Shut up, ma'am," Mowry said. "She's right, Oliver. I'm willing to take a chance to get you out of there.

For the family honor." He was being all Maurie now, putting on his show, shaping up to the high tradition of the clan and all that tripe. "You know why I'm doin' this, don't you?"

"Because you can't defend the jail, I suppose."

"That ain't it. Maybe you don't know that I'm her kin."

"Whose kin?"

"A certain party you're known to have been associatin' with at Tambay."

Doc raised his eyebrows in my direction, meaning was it me. It wasn't my cue to talk. The hero of the piece went on.

"A party you owe it to, to right a wrong, to play the man and the gentleman if you've got it in you and damn well you know who it is."

"I assure you, I haven't an idea what you're—"

"Don't pass words with me," Mowry said. A thought got through to his mind, God knows how. "Maybe she hasn't told you. Has she?"

"Nothing that makes any sense with what you're saying."

"Then I'm tellin' you. She's goin' to have a baby."

"Mom? A *baby?*" His poor face was a picture.

"Mom!" the sheriff yelped. "Cripes! You ain't been foolin' with *her,* too!"

Considering that my fair name was involved, I fig-

ured that it was now my turn to speak. "He's talking about Juddy, Doc."

"Juddy? Good God!"

"That's what," Mowry said. "My young and unprotected cousin. Not so unprotected as you thought, though. When this mess is cleared up, you're comin' back and stand up to your responsibilities. You get that?"

Doc looked like he was on the verge of a knockout. I got back of Mowry and gave Doc all the signals I had in my kit.

"Speak up, damn you!" the sheriff said.

"Y-Y-Yes. Certainly!" Doc said.

"Then you give me your word before this witness that you'll marry her?"

"Yes." Doc got my signal quick this time.

"If you try any funny business I'll hunt you to hell-and-gone. So now we know where we stand. But she sure oughta have told you," he said.

That was a sweet piece of news to leave with Doc. Of course I couldn't get a word in to explain. All he had to go on was that Juddy was in the family way and Mowry held him responsible. Naturally, Doc would think it was Angel Todd, or maybe Hendy Kent. Either way, it would be just about as pleasant for him as being hung on Tambay Tree.

On the way out of town I picked up some of the

corner talk. Bixie Groff had seen Doc shoot. There had been bad blood between Maurie and him. Plenty had heard Maurie call Doc a dirty coward. There was the Rice Club episode, and it was known that Doc had been doing pistol practice since then. I had to admit to myself that it looked bad.

Back at Tambay, I decided to say nothing to Juddy. Her nerves were shot again, since she'd seen that dummy swinging on Tambay Tree. All she needed to know for the present was that Doc's getaway was fixed.

The laundry wagon rolled in at 9:15. Believe it or not, the sheriff himself was at the wheel. We dug Doc out from underneath a pile of blankets and hustled him over to the airplane where Hendy Kent was waiting. Doc said to me:

"I'm glad she's got you, Mom."

"Okay," I said.

"If there's anything I can do, she can rely on me. Tell her that, Mom. *Anything.*"

"I've got it," I said. "On your way, Doc."

The buzzer gave a couple of pops and up they went. Juddy must have seen something to make her suspicious, for she came hustling out, a couple of jumps late, looking like Ophelia in the mad scene. She grabbed me by the neck.

"Has he gone, Mom?"

"Yep. Next stop, Long Island."

"Why didn't you *tell* me? Didn't he leave any word?"

"Good-by and good luck," I said. She wouldn't have understood the message he did leave, and I wasn't feeling up to supplying a diagram. Of course Mowry had to put in his clack.

"He'll do right by you, Cousin," he boomed out, with his manly chest all swelled.

"What did he mean by that?" Juddy asked after he'd left.

"He's crazy," I said.

I was only thankful the old fathead hadn't said more. Probably I'd have had further questions about it, if the telephone hadn't been ringing in Tambay Mansion. On my way to it I knew it was bad. It had that kind of sound.

Old Dr. Starrow spoke from the other end. He didn't say anything definite. He didn't have to. I knew from his voice. Maurie Sears was dead.

Chapter Seventeen
The Blessed House

After the funeral, to which Juddy insisted on going, in spite of Dr. Starrow's orders, the old Doc took me aside.

"Get her away from Tambay," he said, "or I won't answer for consequences."

She made it easy for me. At dinner that night, which she didn't eat any of, or any other meal, for that matter, she brought it up herself.

"Mom," she said, "I'm sorry to go feminine on you, but I'm shot. Unless I get away from this damned place, I'm going to fade and flop like a Victorian virgin."

"Okay," I said. "Where'll you go?"

"Hendy's mother has asked me to take a cruise on their yacht. She's a dear. We've always got along."

"Providence, Rhode Island!" I said. "It's exactly what you need. When'll you be back?"

She didn't look at me, but past me and there was a sort of sick horror in her eyes. "That's it, Mom," she said. "I can't bear to think of coming back."

I gawped at her. "Not ever?"

"Not as I feel now. I'd always see Tambay Tree."

"But you can't walk out on Tambay, girl," I said. "You've put too much of yourself into the place."

"I know," she said.

"And what about old Mom?" I said, with the tremolo stop full on.

"You can have Tambay."

"To hell with Tambay! What good is Tambay to me with you gone?"

It didn't seem the right time to put her wise about her unfortunate condition. Better wait until she was in shape to stand the shock.

Hendy flew back to report, and brought word to the sheriff that Loren Oliver was ready to face trial any time the governor would guarantee his safety.

"Looks like we wouldn't need him," Mowry said.

"How's that again?" I said.

"Bixie Groff has lit out for the hills. He talked too much. The bullet that killed my Cousin Maurie didn't fit Prof Oliver's gun. It did fit Bixie's. No, I don't reckon they'll be any further trouble for the Prof. But I reckon he'd better be gettin' back here. Pretty quick, too."

He gave me the meaningful eye. Fortunately Hendy didn't take any notice. He was explaining to Juddy that his orders were to fly her down to Charleston where the yacht had put in. She went in to finish packing.

"What's about this cruise, Hendy?" I asked him. "Is it a plant to get Juddy back into the Kent family?"

He shook his head and looked quite melancholy, for him. "Not a hope," he said. "I can take it when I'm licked. You never know what you've lost till the ball is over the fence and out of the park. I'm writing my lawyer and having the final papers fixed up, to leave Juddy her freedom. Don't let her marry Todd, though. It'll never work."

A swell lad in lots of ways, Hendy, and no man's fool. His bad luck was in having things come his way too easy. I was sorry for him.

"Make your mind easy, pal," I said. "She isn't having any of Angel."

The helicopter took off with those two in it, leaving a large vacant spot in the mid of my riff, if you get me. I never would have believed a house could be as lonely as Tambay, with Juddy gone. It shivered and shuddered and creaked in its uneasy sleep, until I had to move to the camp. That wasn't any better. I missed Doc as much as Juddy. Imagine me, Mom Baumer, the old road tramp, getting herself all wound up in domestic ties!

In a few days the Sears murder was in the clear. The grand jury indicted Bixie Groff—and find him if you can! One rainy morning, in comes Doc, looking for his breakfast. His first question was about Juddy.

"She's on a cruise," I said.

"Is she all right?"

"Sure, she's all right."

"Does she need me for anything?"

"No, she doesn't need you."

"Well, I thought—are you sure? I mean—has Todd—did the man— Is she married?" He'd finally succeeded in getting it out.

"Not more than usual. Not as much, in fact. Hendy is putting through the divorce."

"Because of *that?"* he said very quick and sharp.

Here was my clue to come clean and tell him there wasn't any "that," but another of my big ideas was stewing in the brainpan. It wasn't cooked quite through yet.

"Hendy doesn't know," I said. "Doc, I don't know how I'm going to get her back. She's lost her taste for this place."

"Because I'm here?"

"I reckon it's mainly because of the Hanging Tree. I'm no Nervous Natalie, Doc, but there's times when I think how close a call it was for you and Old Swoby and—well, I see things, too, passing the bend."

"The tree won't stand forever," he said.

"God send the big wind that'll blow it down!" I said.

"Would she come back then?"

"I wouldn't wonder a mite," I said. "Stick around and see."

He shook his head. "I'm leaving, as soon as I can get things cleaned up."

"Huh? What about your Wandos?"

"No more Wandos."

"What d'you mean, no more Wandos? Dead Injuns don't walk out on you, just like that."

"Dead Injuns is correct," he said. "What I took to be a settlement turned out to be only a burial ground. A sort of private cemetery."

"I'll say it's a cemetery!" I said. "Tombstones for Tambay."

"I don't follow you, Mom."

"You haven't paid off the note yet, have you?"

"No. It isn't due till the first."

"Well, if the Wando lode is played out, you'd be a sucker to waste your four grand. It don't stand to reason."

He put his hand on my shoulder for a second. "What's reason between friends, Mom?" he said.

"Doc," I said, "why don't you use that smile more often? It'd get you elected President of the United States, I wouldn't wonder. Another thing: Are you sure it's all for me that you're doing this?"

He didn't answer for a minute. Then he said, "Well, Mom, it'll take a little time to clear my mind of Tambay after I leave, and I'd hate to have to think of Tambay without Juddy."

"Uh-huh," I said. "It's as bad as that, is it, Doc?"

"It's pretty bad, Mom," he said.

"And when'll you be leaving?"

"In about three weeks. I'm fixing up the stockade as a small field museum."

That night came a big wind. Through it, I kept hearing sounds I didn't understand. Doc and Old Swoby showed up at breakfast with swollen hands.

"Don't you boys have any sense?" I said. "You've been in poison oak again."

"Not this time," Doc said. "Those are honest ax blisters."

"Ax?" I said. "What skulduggery have you been up to?"

"In your own phrase, take a gander," Doc said. He pointed toward the bend in the road.

"Hellfire and campfire!" I said, for there wasn't any Hanging Tree. "Did you fools cut it down?"

"We couldn't wait for God's big wind," Doc said and grinned.

Old Swoby spoke up. "No more hang there."

"I smell trouble," I said. "They'll run you out of the country, on a rail."

Doc shook his head. "They won't do a thing. You don't understand these Southerners, Mom. Underneath all their prejudices and occasional lawlessness there's a sense of fundamental justice. Anyone else who touched that tree would be in for serious trouble—you're right so far. Not Swoby and I, though."

"I get you," I said. "Because they were going to hang you on it."

"Exactly," he said. "We left the ax sticking in the stump. It has my initials on it. My theory is, as Juddy would say, that we'll never hear a word about it. She'll come back now, won't she, Mom?"

"If I have to rope and hogtie her," I said. "We've still got a fight on our hands, though. You'd better stay and help."

"What's the trouble now?" he wanted to know.

"Mowry. When he finds out about the gold, he's liable to be so sore that he'll put the bridge through out of natural cussedness. He didn't get born a bastard just for the name."

"Oh!" Doc said. "I don't think Mowry will get very far with his bridge."

He ducked into the stockade and brought out a fresh-painted sign.

WELLIVER UNIVERSITY
Field Classes, Amerind Ethnology III
Tuesdays and Fridays; 3-5 p.m.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR WARRAND

"What kind of a rabbit comes out of that hat, Doc?" I asked him.

"One that will bite your fat friend with the badge," he said. "This will be officially a working part of the

University. I'm turning over the new lease to Welliver."

"So what?" I said.

"So an old proviso that I happened to recall seeing when I was looking up matters connected with the lease. Here's a copy, in case Mr. Sheriff Mowry drops in."

It was a honey, that law. The gist of it was that no condemnation proceedings for roads or anything else would work in the case of "lands or holdings used for burial ground or church services, or employed in the active prosecution of public education."

I had plenty to tell Juddy when I sat down to my typewriter. She wouldn't get a letter till the Kent yacht docked in Brooklyn, which would be a couple of weeks yet. This is what I two-fingered out.

Friend Juddy,

Trade continues good. My accounts are a mess without you. Bixie Groff shot Maurie. They found his bullet. Angel Todd has quit Welliver. Coach Harley is wild. Sheriff Mowry is still trying to horn in on Tambay. No dice. Loren Oliver has got him checkmated. You know; Old Doc Oliver, the chess player. Mowry has not found it out yet, but the only gold at Tambay was old Chief Whoozis's watch charm. You couldn't mine enough gold in a century here to fill my hollow tooth. What did I always tell you that Doc was a straight shooter. He is back and looking peakid. If that is not spelled right, spell it yourself. He asks after you. So do the Four Horsemen. Tambay Tree is down. Doc and Old Swoby did it with their little hatchet. So you got no excuse not to come back. Let nothing deter you; not

snow nor rain nor heat of the sun nor what have you as Jim Farley wrote on the post office steps. We need you at Tambay.

Yours for results,

MOM.

P.S. I have got something important to explain to you. It is not easy to write. I will tell you when I see you.

Two days before I expected it I get a telegram:

COMING BY FIRST TRAIN LOVE

JUDDY

So there was a situation moving in on me! Wishing an illegitimate child onto a couple of imaginary parents called for more explanation than I had in stock at the moment. Well, when I took chemistry in school, they taught us about a process called catalysis. You bring two substances into contact. Nothing happens. Then you give them a shock—electric spark or something—and they get together with a bang. I figured that by letting Juddy and Doc get together without any previous explanation from me, they'd furnish their own shock. I also figured that I'd just as well be somewhere else when the bang came.

I sent Uncle Andy over to the station for my pal. When she got out of the car at Tambay she looked all around her, and stretched out her arms, kind of loving the place. Loving the world, too, I guess, by her expression. All the vividness of life had come back to her, and

a little extra. She was wearing one of those close-fit sweater rigs that sort of advertise the fact that the wearer is not a man. I met her at the door.

"Hello, Juddy."

"Oh, Mom! I'm back."

"It's swell to have you. You're looking elegant."

"Where's Loren Oliver?"

"Over in the stockade."

"I'll be back in a minute."

So I went into the mansion and sat down and told myself sad stories of the death of kings, and wondered what form the explosion would take. Catalysis, huh? I could think of other words that began the same way, like cataclysm and catastrophe and catfight. The best I could hope was that Doc wouldn't be a worse stumblebum than normal.

By what Juddy reported to me later, the start was peaceful enough. She tried to apologize for being rough about the gold, but he wouldn't have any of that. He was so nervous that pretty soon she got nervous, too.

"What makes you keep looking at me so queerly?" she said.

At that Doc turned so red that she got suspicious.

"You're holding out on me," she said. "What is it? Don't stand there like a dumb bunny."

From then on he was fighting the jitters. The first sense he made was this, and it wasn't too good:

"I want to help you, Juddy. That's all I ask."

"You have helped me. Mom wrote me."

"That's nothing at all. It's so little compared to what I'd willingly do."

That got under her skin. "I don't know why," she said, "when I've been so rotten to you."

"You haven't. I mean, it doesn't matter. In comparison with this, I mean." He bumbled on. "It must be a painful subject for you."

She began to giggle. "You're the one that seems to be in pain. Maybe I ought to be the one to help *you.* What's the painful subject?"

That set him back on his heels. "Do you want me to marry you?" he said.

"So that's the painful subject! Thank you so much. Why should I want to marry you?"

"You've got to marry someone, haven't you?"

"Why?"

"The—the usual reason. You wouldn't have to live with me, you know."

"The usual reason. *The usual reason?"*

By this time poor Doc was desperate. "Mom has told me everything."

"And then some, apparently. *What* has she told you?"

"That you were—were going to have a—a—"

Then Juddy got it. "She's crazy! Or is it you? I'm not going to have anything. How could I? I mean—

wait."

She ran over to the Feederia and gave the three short toots on my whistle that were the come-a-runnin' signal.

It sounded like the trump of doom to me. Coming through the front door, I stopped under the faded sign over the doorway:

St. Francis & St. Benedight
Bless this House from Woful Plighte.

"You two old plumbers have never lifted a finger to help anyone yet," I told them. "Not since I've been at Tambay. Now get busy."

Then I breathed a prayer for those who were about to die and cussed my knees into supporting me over to the stockade. When I saw those two faces, I figured that I might as well get in the first lick and go down fighting. So I gave them the story in words of one syllable.

"And if you don't like it, to hell with both of you," I said. "I'd do the same over again."

Juddy begins to laugh. But Doc glares at me like he was ready to bite. I'll be a thissenthat if the ungrateful twirp wasn't sore. He handed out a line about a young girl's good name that sounded like Sheriff Mowry standing firm for the family honor. Juddy shushed him.

"I'm not sure yet that I know what it's all about,

Mom," she said. "But your Doc has done his part. He says painful as it is, he's willing to marry me, but he won't live with me."

"Lay off him, Juddy," I said, for poor Doc was nearly choking to death, trying to deny he'd ever said any such thing.

"He did, though. He's just the sort that would."

Well, the tone of her voice ought to have told him plenty. But the poor boob still thought she was only making fun of him. So he had to try and defend himself.

"I said she wouldn't have to live with me," he explained to me. "You understand, Mom, don't you? I meant she could always divorce me or annul me or whatever it is the courts do, you know."

"Annul you," she said. "I'd hate to have you annulled, Loren. There's only one of you."

"And the species might die out," I said.

"Not if I can do anything about it," she said. The color came high and quick into her cheeks, but her eyes were brave and steady on him.

At last he got it. "Juddy!" he said. *"Juddy!"*

"Wait one minute. Do you remember a quotation you sprung on me when I first knew you?"

"Yes, I remember." He repeated slowly, " 'Let men tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win with it the utmost passion of her heart.' "

"Yes," Juddy said. "Well, my theory is that you've got nothing to tremble about, my dear."

I walked over and opened the door. "It's your move, chess player," I said.

Smoke was drifting toward the sun that hadn't quite risen when I got up next morning. There was a soft, gray mist over the world. I fed three batches of truckies. Dolf sniffed the spicy air. He put up a paw and nudged my knee.

"Okay, boy," I said. "I know how you feel."

For good-by, I wrote a note and pinned it to the stockade door. It advised Juddy and Doc to get married quick because there wouldn't be any chaperon at Tambay as of this date and until further notice.

At the crossroads gassery the redheaded man came out, yawning.

"Hiya, Mom," he said. "Fill her up?"

"Hiya, Monty," I said. "All she'll take, *and* oil."

He popped his eyes at the Feederia. "Off to the roads again, Mom?"

"Off to the roads."

"Didn't like Tambay?"

"I liked Tambay a lot," I said. "But you can't stay one place forever."

"No," he said. "I expect not. Not if a lady has breathed as much dust as you have, Mom. It gets in

the blood. And there's always the road."

"Yes, there's always the road," I said.

"Good luck, Mom," he said. "I'll be seein' you."

"Someday," I said. "Good luck, Monty."

I put her in gear. The Feederia rolled. The dust banked behind us and rode the breeze back toward Tambay.

I looked ahead at the far turn and wondered what was around on the far side.

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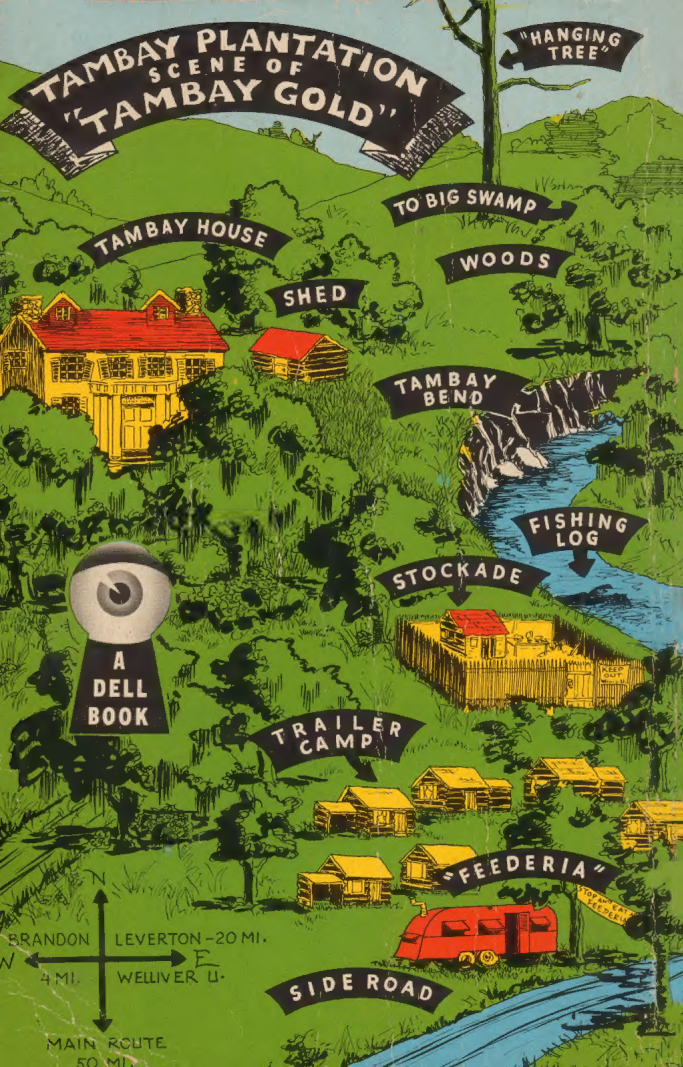
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